VOLUME X, NUMBER 2, SPRING 2010

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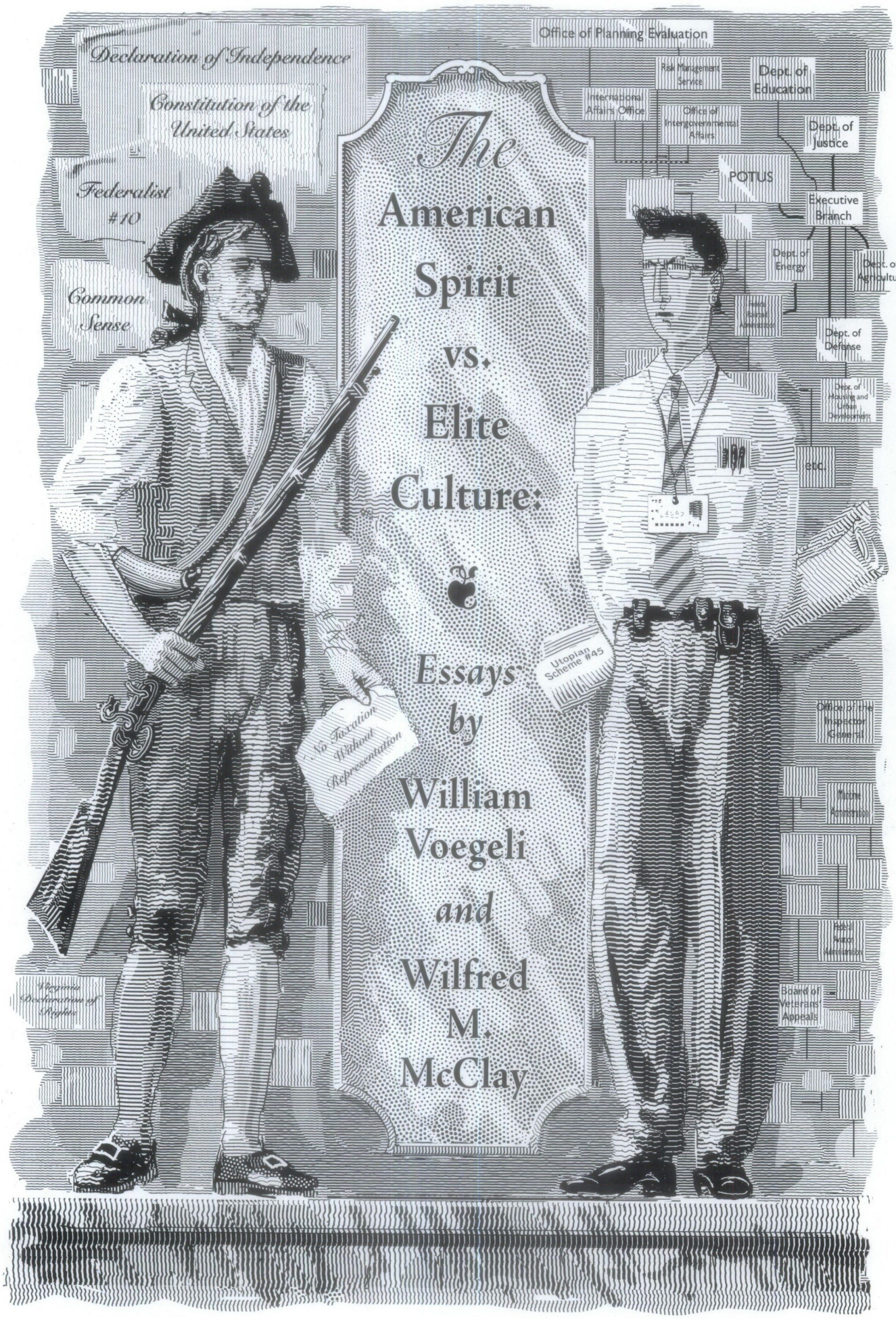

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Are People Being Nice?

by Charles R. Kesler

It's commencement season, when universities around the country ring with platitudinous oratory. The occasion almost demands it. At the University of Michigan, President Barack Obama did not disappoint. His commencement address was amusing, gracious, and, in his choice of platitudes, very revealing. As a snapshot of a thoughtful liberal unpacking his working assumptions, Obama's speech is worth pondering.

He introduced his theme in Art Linkletter fashion, borrowing from a letter sent by a kindergarten class. They asked the darndest questions. Do you work a lot? Do you live next to a volcano? (They probably spotted the miasma emanating from the health care bill.) And the one the president settled on: Are people being nice?

Short answer: No, they're not, especially to me and my administration. He earnestly wants the lions to lie down with the lambs, and vice versa. Yet he understands—with that comprehensive but painfully condescending empathy of his—that this is unlikely to happen so long as "changes" and "challenges" cause "tension in the body politic." Unemployment, globalization, having to "live and work with more people who don't look like you or think like you or come from where you do"—no wonder Americans cling to their God and guns these days! Obama loves to contextualize, put into perspective, and thus ignore every opponent's argument. He cuts everyone down to sociological size, except himself.

To be sure, he told the class of 2010 that politics is historically a messy, contentious business, that "great debates" stir "great passions." He implied under his breath that if people are ever to be nice, America needs to stop having such great debates or, failing that, needs to suppress the attendant passions. In effect, he explored each option.

The "first Americans," who threw off British tyranny, were "understandably skeptical of government," Obama allowed—contextualizing, again—and conceded that their preference for individual freedom remains "a strand of our nation's DNA." But he made clear this wasn't the dominant strand, because the nation had developed its own growing needs, and to service them "government must keep pace with the times."

In other words, Americans may continue to have debates about the proper role of government, but these won't be rollicking, history-changing arguments anymore because History has already spoken on the subject. Decisive challenges to the liberal state, to the government that follows the progressive Zeitgeist, are ruled out as anachronistic, dangerous, intolerable. There's no going back to the founders' individualism. Nostalgia for the old freedom only leads to confusion, such as exhibited in a sign during the health care debate: "Keep Your Government Hands Out of My Medicare!"

Though this could be a healthy confusion, Obama dismissed it instead as a sign of irrational hatred of government. "In our democracy," he explained patiently, "government is us." Government is "We the People," our firefighters, police officers, soldiers, regulators, and public university teachers. It never occurred to him that public employee unions—or for that matter, government itself—might develop an interest opposed to that of taxpayers and citizens. Nor did he acknowledge that "We the People" made a Constitution precisely so that the people's will, incorporating every moral and rational safeguard, could prevail over the government's.

To repress whatever great passions still manage to challenge progressive politics, Obama recommended to his audience civility. This was the part of the speech the media noticed, and in it he offered some sensible advice on civic friendship: stop shouting; listen; don't demonize your opponents; and so forth. But even here his blinders were showing.

Incivility robs Americans of the "rational and serious debate...we need to have about the very real and very big challenges facing this nation," he said. He meant: the debate my opponents want to have over limiting the size and purposes of government, is getting in the way of the debate I want to have over how to expand government in a smarter, better, and faster way. That is, the debate is first of all over which debate to have, with Obama firmly but less than candidly condemning conservatives' proposed topic as illegitimate. That debate over limited government was held—and lost—a long time ago, he claimed in effect. Let's move on.

For liberals, being nice usually comes down to that banality: "let's move on." Above all, don't ever question their motives, because that might lead to questioning their principles. And that's not nice—or permitted.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Winning the War on Terrorism

Angelo Codevilla, with Paul Seabury, wrote the best short introduction to war in recent years, *War: Ends and Means*. What Codevilla writes about contemporary conflict is always strongly—even explosively—worded, and in the end more persuasive than not. After September 11, Codevilla has serially lectured us on our half-hearted and at times counterproductive methods of waging war against terrorists and Middle Eastern regimes—hence the lament of his present essay, "Why We Don't Win" (Winter 2009/10). His pessimistic appraisal covers America's nearly decade-long, multifaceted counter-response to radical Islam: he argues that we did not achieve *any* of our aims in Iraq; that our therapeutic diplomacy has weakened us in relation to our enemies in the Middle East; and that nine years after 9/11, we have not improved to any measurable degree our homeland security.

Is Codevilla's pessimism overwrought? At first glance, many would certainly think so—after all, Americans have not been hit by another major attack comparable to 9/11. Although we immediately allowed the Baathist-led army to dissipate, watched wide-scale looting in Baghdad, pulled back from the first siege of Fallujah, and gave a reprieve to Moqtada Sadr, Iraq's consensual government survives against all odds. The country no longer translates its oil wealth into attacks against its neighbors. The recent election of the secularist Ayad Allawi suggests that Iraqis are more worried about religious fundamentalism than about candidates supposedly tainted with past American associations. An open Iraq may in the long run prove to be more destabilizing to Iran's paranoid theocrats than their legions of terrorists were to it. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda's grandees are still dying at a quick clip in American Predator drone attacks. And the popularity of both Osama bin Laden and his favored tactic of suicide bombing have dived in the Middle East's most recent opinion polls.

But to be fair to Codevilla, he is not talking about the ebb and flow of battle against radical Islam and its supporters and empathizers. Instead, as his title suggests, Codevilla is worried why there is still a war at all: why can't the most powerful nation in the history of arms once and for all crush its far weaker enemies? That is a good question inasmuch as bin Laden and Dr. Zawahiri, and their leadership, apparently survive—and survive in areas under the control of our own Middle East "allies." America worries more about whether radical anti-American Arab autocracies are fond of us, than Syria or Libya worries about a righteously angry United States. We contort to distance ourselves from a Western democratic Israel. The Taliban is resurgent. In 2009 there were more radical Islamic terrorist plots uncovered at home than in any year since 2001—as the efforts by Najibullah Zazi, Major Nidal Hasan, and the wannabe Christmas Day suicide bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab all remind us.

To assess Codevilla's diagnosis, perhaps we can juxtapose his own accusations with developments that have transpired *after* his writ was composed. For example, Codevilla derides our politically-correct fears of offending radical Islam. Yet since he composed his essay, the Obama Administration has proscribed the term "Islamic extremism" altogether. Codevilla also notes that the administration and the media exaggerate right-wing domestic terrorism in politically-correct tit-for-tat fashion, in an effort to reassure Muslims that their radicals are no more dangerous than our own homegrown ones. Again, we have just witnessed a media hysteria over "right-wing violence" in the Tea Party movement—as though anyone trying to blow up Americans at 30,000 feet would be evoking Jesus Christ or Sarah Palin as the plane disintegrates.

Codevilla argues that our utopianism in the current war is merely the logical consequence of a long-standing American naïveté about the nature of war itself. That delusion is fueled in part by the fallacy that nuclear weapons somehow have changed conflict irrevocably by limiting war. Here, too, the dour Codevilla seems to have presaged President Obama's recent nuclear initiatives, which boil down to assuring would-be nuclear enemies that, *We won't nuke you, even if you use biological or nerve agents against us, so why get a nuke at all?*—as if such pre-nuclear appeasement won't whet a thug's appetite for even greater concessions to follow, when he really does get the bomb.

On the diplomatic front, Codevilla describes accurately a "speak loudly and carry a small stick" policy, the signature of what he calls "the ruling class." Again, note Barack Obama's four missed deadlines for the Iranian theocracy to quit weapons-grade production of enriched uranium—capped by the regime's denunciation of Obama's summit on non-proliferation. Codevilla's gripe about our efforts at stopping Iran is not over the policy choice of sanctions, bombing, or regime change, but over the degree to which we will pursue seriously any or all of the three.

In the end, Codevilla is not a "more rubble, less trouble" Dr. Strangelove, calling for Baghdad or Khandahar to end up like Grozny. His moral point can be distilled to a reluctance to ask our service people to fight wars that we do not plan to win—and a refusal to delude our citizenry that they are safe from their enemies. In his view, our elites accept a "logic that flows from the heights of American universities through the bureaucracies and the war colleges." In other words, we draw on our wealth and strength not to defeat enemies, but to delude ourselves into thinking we are immune from the rather nasty rules of war.

Yet in a democracy the people get the leaders they deserve, who reflect the values of their constituents. Codevilla begins by citing polls that may reflect American unhappiness with our on-again/off-again wars and even greater dissatisfaction with our government itself. Yet I doubt that such discontent necessarily translates into the sort of toughness Codevilla advocates—at least when the costs mount and the shrillness begins. So at least part of the problem lies not in our stars, but in ourselves. Nation-building—as we know from late republican Rome to 19th-century Britain to postwar America—is rightly an epiphenomenon, not a catalyst. An enemy should first be defeated, humiliated, and then, and only then, given magnanimous terms. Generosity of spirit and change in the attitude of the defeated improve the chances for a lasting peace—but both are predicated on the fact that the enemy is first materially and psychologically vanquished.

In recent years, we put the proverbial cart of nation-building before the horse of crushing an enemy, because in our opulent, therapeutic society we thought we could get away with it (and in small wars like Panama and Grenada sometimes

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Attn.: Letters to the Editor
937 West Foothill Blvd., Suite E
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did), and because we did not wish to feel that we had forsaken the world of reason and caring, in order to operate on bleak principles deeply embedded within our reptilian brains. Thus we do not give the Arab autocracies, the Islamic terrorists, or would-be nuclear Iran the sort of quiet ultimatums, backed by real action, that Codevilla would like: cease your anti-American aggression or face untold hurt and damage. The reason for our hesitancy is because we, the American people, would probably be uncomfortable with what that follow-through would entail.

From time to time, we get a glimpse of the public queasiness to which such unapologetic force leads: the monster Milosevic slowly morphing into a victim as the Clinton bombing became prolonged and occasionally sloppy; the American repugnance in late February 1991 at the televised "Highway of Death" when looters, thugs, and rapists were incinerated with their booty on the way home from rapine in Kuwait—and on their way to murder Shiite insurrectionists; or the collective furor at seeing American contractors hung on girders outside of Fallujah in spring 2004 quickly transmogrifing from a tough Marine response into outsourcing the problem to the Baathist "Fallujah Brigade."

In other words, had we waged a tougher war in Iraq, or in ruthless fashion played off one tribal thug against another in Afghanistan, or really cut off commerce with Iran, the American people might not have welcomed the fallout—especially as amplified and dissected by National Public Radio, *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. We deprecate these megaphones as the "elite" or "mainstream" press, but they reflect a postwar American self-regard at being singularly able to defeat enemies while being liked and thought fair by all in the process.

At times in our history enemies have disabused us of such pretensions, and it is to Codevilla's credit that he warns us that we need not periodically reacquaint ourselves with such ancient wisdom only through excruciating pain.

Victor Davis Hanson
Fresno, CA

I love Angelo Codevilla. Such strong, clear writing. Such challenging ideas. You're never in doubt about what he thinks or why he thinks it. His latest essay is a forceful and convincing indictment of an entire "ruling class" that, in his view, fails to understand the world as it really is, and has swallowed whole the crazy politically correct view that now dominates the media and the universities. If he is right, this is not a temporary failure of our governing and educating elites, but a chronic shortcoming of the entire system.

Codevilla neatly catches the surprising combination of fecklessness and self-proclaimed intellectual superiority of our current elites, leading them to caricature anyone who actually wants to defeat our enemies as some sort of Neanderthal. They send our troops into battle with poorly defined objectives and muddled strategy. Codevilla gives several examples of this self-inflicted confusion, ranging from Afghanistan to Iraq to Iran. He well captures the highly challenging rules of engagement under which our men and women fight, rules that sometimes seem to have been designed with greater concern for our enemies than for ourselves.

All these points are made vigorously and convincingly, but one is sometimes left wondering if things are quite as clear as Codevilla would have us believe. That life, even at the highest levels of government and society, is full of error and confusion should surprise no one. It is certainly true, as Codevilla says, that we went to war in Iraq with a very confused set of missions. But I don't think that confusion should be blamed entirely or even primarily on a misguided view of the world. It stemmed at least in equal part from the normal, ubiquitous problems of modern government, above all from bureaucratic conflict that led some of us in 2003 to remark that the State Department and the CIA were fighting harder against the Iraqi National Congress than against Saddam Hussein's evil regime.

Codevilla is very critical of the Bush Administration for failing to recognize that terrorism—including the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001—is primarily the responsibility of states: "the host of governments that espouse violent anti-American causes and that facilitate the individuals who actually do the killing." He says that our leaders rejected this view, but in fact President Bush said precisely what Codevilla says, namely that we had been attacked by, and were therefore at war with, a series of terrorist organizations supported by a series of states. And he announced that we would not distinguish between them. We would attack the terrorists and we would attack state sponsors of terror.

I think Codevilla is being a bit unfair when he asks "what was the problem that overthrowing Saddam's regime was supposed to fix?" At the time, I thought that Iraq was to be one battle in the war against the terror masters, and that we knew that we were at war with Iran as well. As I wrote back then, Iran and Syria could see their doom and were compelled to confront us in Iraq.

There are times when Codevilla seems to fall for the notion that Sunnis and Shia are everywhere and forever locked in mortal combat. He suggests, for example, that during the Iraq war we might have "demanded that Iran stop sponsoring Hezbollah lest perhaps the U.S. Expeditionary force...add Iran's Kurdish zones to the new Kurdistan." Good luck with that one! Hezbollah, created 20 years earlier, is the spinal cord for Iran's foreign operations, and its sacrifice would be a mortal blow to the country's messianic ambitions.

I have other quibbles, but the importance of Codevilla's superb essay lies in its central thesis: the corruption of the American ruling class. If he is right, if the elites coming out of American universities understand neither the workings of the real world nor the kind of action we must conduct in order to survive, then we are in a real jam.

Michael Ledeen
Foundation for Defense
of Democracies
Washington, D.C.

"Why We Don't Win" is a *tour de force*. Angelo Codevilla's elegantly controlled rage against inside-the-Beltway foolishness captures the tragedy of U.S. policy toward the Middle East and Islam over the past decade. It clarifies my own thinking on these matters.

I regret that the article has not prompted the widespread attention and debate it deserves. Disaster, presumably, must strike before this profound voice will receive its rightful hearing.

Daniel Pipes
The Middle East Forum
Philadelphia, PA

Angelo M. Codevilla replies:

My friend Michael Ledeen's colloquial language sometimes makes the reader work to grasp what he means. Always, it is worth the effort. Ledeen writes:

> [Codevilla] suggests, for example, that during the Iraq war we might have "demanded that Iran stop sponsoring Hezbollah lest perhaps the U.S. Expeditionary force...add Iran's Kurdish zones to the new Kurdistan." Good luck with that one! Hezbollah, created 20 years earlier, is the spinal cord for Iran's foreign operations, and its sacrifice would be a mortal blow to the country's messianic ambitions.

Does he mean that the U.S. government was correct in not taking advantage of its massive force in Iraq to exact from Iran such concessions as would cripple its capacity to hurt us? Especially right after April 2003, American forces in Iraq were capable of doing a lot more to the

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Iranian regime than just depriving it of dominion over Kurds—which we might well have done for its own sake. How much pain and risk of death was the regime willing to endure for the sake of Hezbollah? How much was it willing to lose on behalf of its nuclear program—in a fight every round of which it would have lost worse than the previous one? We will never know because, as I wrote, our foreign policy establishment does not wield sticks any more seriously than it does carrots. It is truer now of our best and brightest than when Charles DeGaulle said it in 1963: *"Ils ne sont pas serieux."* They are not serious. Ledeen offers evidence for this when he writes:

> in fact President Bush said precisely what Codevilla says, namely that we had been attacked by, and were therefore at war with, a series of terrorist organizations supported by a series of states. And he announced that we would not distinguish between them. We would attack the terrorists and we would attack state sponsors of terror.

Indeed he said it perfectly, eloquently, on September 20, 2001. But then he acted otherwise. Ledeen writes that he expected the Bush Administration to overawe Iran and Syria or to fight them, and was surprised when it turned the "war" into attempts at nation-building. What surprise? The default mode of our best and brightest has been to make grandiose statements about fighting America's enemies and then settle down to tinkering with foreign politics: in Saigon overthrowing Diem, in Baghdad stifling the Iraqi National Congress, and in Afghanistan playing puppet games while all sorts of people get shot for no good reason.

Ledeen does not believe that this failure "should be blamed entirely or even primarily on a misguided view of the world. It stemmed at least in equal part from the normal, ubiquitous problems of modern government, above all from bureaucratic conflict." Certainly conflict among officials is ubiquitous. But what leads me to believe—correct me if I am mistaken—that most of those who lead our agencies and write for their teleprompters "understand neither the workings of the real world nor the kind of action we must conduct in order to survive" is that the alternatives over which they fight have not been all that different. Theirs are the failures of a remarkably homogeneous, bipartisan leadership class.

Daniel Pipes raises the question: must disaster strike before the country realizes that our foreign policy amounts to "inside-the-Beltway foolishness"? Alas, disaster did strike on 9/11. And the country (minus its Jeremiah Wrights) did rise and give the government all the powers to fix the problem for which it asked. But since the problem lies in the government rather than in the country....

Or does it? Victor Hanson suggests the contrary: "in a democracy the people get the leaders they deserve, who reflect the values of their constituents." He gives that most terminal of diagnoses after having termed my dissection of incompetence at the highest levels—which is curable—as "pessimistic" and "dour." He notes, as I do, that events are rapidly removing doubt about the incompetence of those in charge of our foreign policy. But he suggests that the American people might not be willing to support a competent one: "at least part of the problem lies not in our stars, but in ourselves." I think the people's failings are small in comparison with those of our ruling class.

Although it is true, as Hanson writes, that we Americans vaunt ourselves as "singularly able to defeat enemies while being liked and thought fair by all in the process," few outside the ruling class share its passion for "nation-building." Americans are famously compassionate to defeated enemies. But only our highly credentialed leaders "put the cart of nation-building ahead of the horse of crushing an enemy." Moreover, since immigrants do not come to America to rule the world, the American body politic has no imperialist bones.

On the other hand, polls at each stage of our post-World War II conflicts have shown the American people far more favorable to energetic, effective action against our enemies than was the government at the time. For example, Henry Kissinger acknowledged that "hawks" outnumbered "doves" at each stage of his concessions to North Vietnam. In 1991, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, and others decided not to destroy Iraq's Republican Guard and to keep Saddam in power. If public opinion had ruled, Hanoi would have been bombed seriously, or flooded and/or invaded, and Saddam would have been gone. The American people very much want to trust that the blood and treasure we give to our government in such conflicts is being used fruitfully. Yet few hold our leaders accountable for each success or failure—as happened when the military draft involved most of society. Though a majority of Americans have sensed that our government and the prestigious institutions arrayed around it are wrongheaded, few want to contemplate what it means to be led by incompetents.

Hanson's point, however, is deeper. He writes that the reason why our ruling class has involved us in war without following such "nasty rules of war" as "stop this, or else" and then following up, is that "we, the American people, would probably be uncomfortable with what that follow-through would entail." I submit that we do not know that. Years ago, while I was wielding some budget power over the intelligence agencies and Department of Defense and part of the Washington policy mill, any number of officials would object to a suggestion of mine with something like: "makes a lot of sense, but the American people wouldn't support that." I would answer: "Why not ask? It's their interests and their lives. What right have you or I to prejudge and therefore preclude their choices? Why not submit to the Congress realistic arguments about what each course of action would entail?"

Hanson argues that

> had we waged tougher war in Iraq, or in ruthless fashion played off one tribal thug against another in Afghanistan, or really cut off commerce with Iran, the American people might not have welcomed the fallout—especially as amplified and dissected by National Public Radio, *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*

and cites "the collective furor at seeing American contractors hung on girders outside of Fallujah in spring 2004 quickly transmogrifing from a tough Marine response into outsourcing the problem to the laughable Baathist 'Fallujah Brigade'" as evidence that no-nonsense foreign policy would engender "queasiness" among Americans, ending in nonsense anyway. But that is not what happened. I ask, whose furor, whose queasiness? The polls would not have answered the question "What should we do about Sunni insurgents who torture-murdered Americans?" with "Turn over the city to them." Rather, many within the National Security Council staff, State Department, and especially CIA—and a few in the Army, including General David Petraeus—had been arguing precisely that we could turn Sunni insurgents into allies by conceding to them control of certain territory, plus other incentives, in exchange for cooperation. We saw the results.

Once upon a time, in Athens' Pnyx, the men who wielded shield and spear would sit to debate whether and how to use them. Their decisions were not always good. But they were responsible. America's founders, famous for splitting powers among branches and sovereignties, confided the war power to Congress alone. That power long since passed to the agencies that advise the president formally, and to select media and think tanks to which the agencies look to ratify their own legitimacy. These deciders have less

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and less in common—socially and religiously—with those who fight. This might matter less had their decisions brought victory, peace, and many good things. But they have brought the opposite.

I did not and do not mean to argue that the American people are the infallible, incorruptible source of wisdom. The highly placed persons who have contributed or not objected seriously to America's downward spiral have some active support among the general population and have enjoyed the majority's presumption that they would do more or less the right thing. But they have forfeited it. Reacting to their own failures, they have been more dismissive than ever of outside views. A turnover of leadership in our leading institutions must come, either sooner by force of argument or later, forced by events. I join with Hanson in hoping that reason will prevail, soon.

Lincoln as One of Us

Allen Guelzo is a superb historian and an accomplished Lincoln scholar. His review-essay "The Bicentennial Lincolns" (Winter 2009/10) reminds us to remember Abraham Lincoln's "historical remoteness," to curb our endless yearning to draw Lincoln into our own times and make him speak to, for, and about *us*, rather than about the 1850s and 1860s. Many writers over the years have issued the same warnings, and the Lincoln publishing industry as well as commercial uses of the man in the stove-pipe hat in advertising and popular culture, surge unabated. And yes, of course, as Guelzo contends, the recent "tsunami" of Lincoln books is, in part, the result of "simple literary opportunism." That is not news.

But Professor Guelzo is angry; he believes conservative scholarship has been shunted aside by recent work, much of which "reeks" of a "Left imperialism" determined to appropriate Lincoln for modern liberal causes, "in much the same spirit that a spoiled child lays claim to another child's toy." Guelzo's ascerbic wit is entertaining, and sometimes accurate. But the essay also reeks of ironies about which Guelzo seems unaware.

Among the thousands of pages in all the books Guelzo reviews, he singles out one essay of mine in Eric Foner's collection *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*. The piece, "The Theft of Lincoln in Scholarship, Politics and Public Memory," actually agrees with one of Guelzo's general complaints—that Lincoln is constantly lifted from his own contexts and made into a "usable historical commodity." I spend some pages demonstrating how this has emerged in our political culture and journalism on the left and the right. But two elements of my piece have made Guelzo dyspeptic and apparently unable to acknowledge the essay's argument.

He claims my essay is the "most uncloaked" example of "left-wing holy-rolling." With phrasing like that who wouldn't eagerly read on? Misreading the point of my piece, Guelzo claims that I doubt "whether Lincoln deserves much credit as the Emancipator" and that I pledge myself to the "self-emancipation thesis." I harbor no such "doubts" and have made no such "pledges." I did take issue with Guelzo's own published contempt for even the suggestion that some slaves—several hundred thousand—did, through their own volition, bravery, and cunning contribute to their own liberation. The evidence for this is massive in the many volumes of the *Documentary History of Emancipation*. And Professor Guelzo may want to glance at my recent book, *A Slave No More*, in which I publish the personal narratives and reconstruct the stories of two former slaves, John Washington and Wallace Turnage, who without doubt fashioned their own freedom, as they benefited from both Lincoln's Proclamation and compassionate Union officers. In that book I also make clear that Lincoln, as well as the Union army and navy, were absolutely crucial to how, when, and where emancipation happened and why it endured. The only pledges any of us should make are to the evidence. Who freed the slaves, Lincoln or the slaves themselves? The answer has been in plain sight for a very long time—*both*. And Guelzo is uninformed about the longevity of these arguments; they long pre-date Ken Burns's 1990 film series.

The other issue that troubles Guelzo, and the main point of my essay, is that I document the scurrilous, deceptive, sometimes frankly racist misuses of the "party of Lincoln" rhetoric by the contemporary Republican Party in its failed recent efforts to appeal to African-American voters. If Lincoln has been a "toy" or a "commodity" ripped out of his context as Guelzo contends, he has been so to no one more than conservative Republicans who cannot stop invoking his name and reputation as they increasingly despise the "big government" that he created. Lincoln *was* an "emancipator," and he really believed in activist government; the problem is that modern Republicans have hardly been the emancipators of their era and they do not believe in government.

Guelzo lampoons my demonstration of the laughable efforts by the George W. Bush Administration and the Republican National Committee under Ken Mehlman to reach out to blacks in 2004–06 with ridiculous, ahistorical propaganda claiming, among other haymakers, that the Republican Party has throughout its existence been "the mightiest force for individual liberty in the history of the world" (from the RNC's "Freedom Calendar" of 2005). Lincoln in the Second Inaugural and John Bingham in writing the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, perhaps. But from 1964 to 2010? Please! Instead of mocking my critique of Bush-era Republicans, saying that I believe they wear Lincoln as a "Halloween disguise" when appealing to blacks (good line, wish I'd used it!), he might have attempted some defense of why Bush and Mehlman had to go before the NAACP in 2006 and openly apologize for the "Southern strategy," for "trying to benefit politically from racial polarization" that they themselves had caused (Mehlman's words), and for writing "off the African-American vote" (Bush's words). Or, he might attempt some explanation for why not a single black Republican sits today in the U.S. Congress. Guelzo avoided addressing that part of my essay. Legitimately, that may not be his responsibility as a historian. But someone from within the Republican ranks needs to fashion an honest explanation for why the "party of Lincoln" has become the White American Party, adorning itself with tea bags, guns, anti-intellectualism, racist anti-Obama posters, "Confederate History Month," and militant libertarians who hate the central government Lincoln preserved and re-imagined.

David W. Blight
Yale University
New Haven, CT

Allen Guelzo performs a Herculean task in reviewing the copious scholarship accompanying the Lincoln bicentennial. He is quite right in lamenting how much of this scholarship continues a long history of reimagining Lincoln as "one of us" for the purpose of flattering ideological dogmas. That historians of the New Left are undertaking many of these efforts, however, may not be cause for complete despair.

It is true, as Guelzo aptly demonstrates, that many of these histories of Lincoln are slapdash and seem more concerned with exploiting our 16th president than with trying to understand him. But it is ironic that the New Left is emphasizing "Great Men" in their histories at all. For decades, these writers have devalued the historical emphasis on particular human beings in favor of narratives that concentrate on the "currents" of history (the great "isms") or the influence of groups and social movements. The New Left's continuing infatuation with Abraham Lincoln betrays a grudging awareness of the importance of statesmanship in American history. It means, too, that the growing body of excellent scholarship on Lincoln's statesmanship—

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much of which Guelzo himself has contributed—cannot be ignored.

Eric C. Sands
Berry College
Rome, GA

I have read with great interest Allen Guelzo's survey of "The Bicentennial Lincolns," amounting in all to 24 books. Most extensive is his discussion of Michael Burlingame's *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*. Burlingame exceeds all previous biographies in the depth and comprehensiveness of his research, the exhaustiveness of which always enhances our interest and does not clog the story.

Notwithstanding his ungrudging praise, Guelzo notes that

> It is clear that the Lincoln who matters most to Burlingame is the psychological Lincoln, the Lincoln who rises from mental loss and humiliation as a young man, who suffers from what we would call "spousal abuse"... and who bears the sorrows of a bleeding nation through four years of war without losing his balance or resiliency.

Guelzo continues:

> What is missing from Burlingame—in fact what seems to have taken French leave from almost all the Lincoln bicentennial books—is the political Lincoln. Not the politically corrected Lincoln... but the political Lincoln as he himself knew and understood politics.

This is as close as Guelzo comes to Leo Strauss's irrefutable and indispensable (as it seems to me) maxim, that it is our task to understand the thinkers of the past as they understood themselves before trying to understand them differently or better. That is to say, before characterizing something as wise or foolish one must be able to say what it was in the mind one is studying.

In Lincoln's case, this is made easier by his numerous statements of what he believed and why. Foremost among these statements is of course the Gettysburg Address, and the dedication to the proposition that all men are created equal. Familiarity with Lincoln's writings, particularly from 1854, shows that what is expressed in the Gettysburg Address is no isolated event, but is a culminating event. In 1859 he said that "the principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society." And he praised Jefferson for introducing "into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth applicable to all men and all times." In Independence Hall in February 1861 he said that he had "never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

Jefferson was not an authority for Whig doctrine. I am surprised therefore at Guelzo's identification of Lincoln's principles with his commitment to Whig policies, and Guelzo's silence concerning the Declaration of Independence. There is no dispute as to the unvarying firmness of Lincoln's support for the Whig program for banks, tariffs, and internal improvements. These policies moreover had greater success during Lincoln's presidency, when the Whigs had transmigrated into Republicans, than in the days of Whig ascendancy. But Lincoln's principles, properly so called, transcend party distinctions, even when they were adopted by a party, as they were by the Republicans in 1856 and 1860 (but not since then).

Harry V. Jaffa
Claremont, CA

In his spirited essay, "The Bicentennial Lincolns," Allen Guelzo concludes that the greatness of Lincoln "will rest on how much genuine credit (and not just notional assent) we still give his politics as the embodiment of natural laws written onto the hard disk of human nature and transcending the circumstances of his times." Taking Lincoln to heart by asking what he would do under a given set of circumstances—making him "one of us" as Guelzo puts it—might seem a reasonable thing to do. But Guelzo frowns on this response to what he calls the problem of Lincoln's "historical remoteness" as "popular but insincere" and not intellectually serious. Richard Hofstadter avoided this danger, Guelzo notes, by asserting that Lincoln was wrong on the big political questions of his day, as though Hofstadter not only understood Lincoln but also knew what the right thing to do was in the situations he faced.

By stating that Hofstadter "had no illusion that he could rewrite or erase the politics and still have the man," Guelzo overestimates the famous historian's intellectual probity. By contrast, Guelzo is hard on today's progressive historians, who condescend to praise Lincoln's "splendid inconsistency" and his capacity for "change, growth, and contradiction," as seen in his adoption of military emancipation when forced to do so by the slaves' self-emancipation. Latter-day progressives treat Lincoln as "one of us" by making him out to be a "modern-day soft Progressive." Yet Hofstadter similarly conformed to a progressive standard in his sympathy for the South and failure to understand Lincoln's dedication to the principle of national union.

Although Lincoln took his creed from the Declaration of Independence, Hofstadter argued that "in the end it was the Declaration that he could not make a consistent part of his living work." Quoting Lincoln's 1848 assertion of the right to revolution, Hofstadter wrote that Lincoln "suppressed secession and refused to acknowledge that the right of revolution he had so boldly accepted belonged to the South." According to Hofstadter, in defending the federal government's authority to maintain the Union "Lincoln inverted the main issue of the war to suit his purpose. What the North was waging, of course, was a war to save the Union by denying self-determination to the majority of Southern whites." With suitable condescension, Hofstadter (quoting historian Kenneth Stampp) ob-

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served that "the burden [of responsibility] rested not on Lincoln alone, but on the universal standards of statesmanship and on the whole concept of 'national interest.'"

Implicit in the Whig principles of political economy that shaped Lincoln's political character was the determination of a new Republican Party to preserve America's constitutional Union. By recognizing that secession was unjustified rebellion, Lincoln reversed the course of national disintegration promoted by popular sovereignty (both in its Northern Democrat and Southern secessionist forms) and ultimately ensured citizenship for black Americans because it was implicit in the meaning of republican self-government and intrinsically related to the nature of the Union and American national identity. Progressives from Richard Hofstadter to today's multiculturalists still fail to understand these facts.

Herman Belz
Rockville, MD

Allen Guelzo's wide-ranging analysis of recent books on Lincoln reminds us that Lincoln's words (and sometimes the words of witnesses and friends) often make claims upon interpreters who assume that the march of history trumps the primary textual record. To ignore those claims is to ignore history, just as a disregard for historical context often injures an interpreter's ability to read a text closely and well.

Guelzo usefully identifies a number of misguided approaches to the textual and historical records, which seem especially malleable in Lincoln's case. My concern is that what Guelzo offers as an alternative to bogus readings of Lincoln—the recognition of Lincoln's Whig roots and their symbiotic relation to his "embodiment of natural laws written onto the hard disk of human nature"—does not go far enough to describe even the Lincoln of antebellum times.

The Whig legacy in Lincoln's politics has a particularly problematic dimension documented in the primary texts, one that seems to have no connection, or even allowance for, natural law. Lincoln's support of the Michigan Canal project while the Illinois state government faced bankruptcy led to his proposal that news bonds be floated to pay the interest on the old. For a Whig who believed that "money is only valuable in circulation," the idea was not strange, though Lincoln says he reached that conclusion after much thought as a last resort. In the *Sangamo Journal*'s paraphrase of his speech on the bonds, he said he "believed it would have the effect to raise our other bonds in market" and that "[i]f our increasing means would justify us in deferring to a future time the resort to taxation, then we had better pay compound interest, than resort to taxation now." The debt was so large, he said, there was no way for taxes to pay it—until and if the galloping increase of the state's population supplied the taxpayers.

History records that the canal was successfully refinanced five years later, after the virtual ruination of the project in 1840. It became an engine for the state's economy. But what are we to make of Lincoln's apparently relativistic attitude toward the currency, and his eventual application of such notions of finance to immense wartime expenditures covered by the printing of greenbacks? Where is natural law in this extreme version of capitalism: the almost purely engineered generation of species from species, in anticipation of winning the confidence of newly-arrived citizens willing to pay the bill? If this Whiggish philosophy in any way allows for the flourishing of natural enterprise and the belief in transcendent qualities embodied in human nature, as Guelzo claims, we will have to look to Lincoln's other works for an explanation. What Guelzo has identified as a double strain in Lincoln's Whiggism—support for public works and reliance upon the individual enterprise of the natural man—leaves us with a most perplexing paradox.

In order to judge such apparent inconsistencies, we must return to the written works as a whole. Guelzo rightly directs our attention to Lincoln's remarkably dedicated reading in 18th-century political economy, which drew him into various considerations of the mixture of statecraft and soulcraft. Lincoln's view of natural law is not bounded by Darwinian thought, or even by the Declaration's Jeffersonian axioms. His politics are influenced by his psychological dimensions, especially a soul-moving power of persuasion that seems to be connected to his sense of who he is and what we are and might be, for better and for worse. We do not have much access to these things, beyond a certain point, in the study of history without turning to Lincoln's written work.

John C. Briggs
University of California, Riverside
Riverside, CA

When it comes to Abraham Lincoln, I normally and prudently defer to my friend Allen Guelzo, who, like Harry Jaffa, has forgotten more about the 16th president than most people will ever know. But I must take issue with him on the topic of Lincoln as war president.

Guelzo argues that the dominant military doctrine of the time, shaped by the influence of Napoleon Bonaparte, saw victory in war as the result of a war-winning, decisive battle of annihilation along the lines of the emperor's defeat of the Third Coalition at Austerlitz in 1805 and the of Prussians at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806. He contends that such decisive battles were impossible by the 1850s because of the size of field armies, and that therefore Lincoln's directive to his generals to focus on defeating the Rebel armies was "almost the worst advice a commander-in-chief could have given in the 19th century." Guelzo asserts that the proper focus instead should have been on destroying the Confederate logistical system.

This assessment is flawed in a number of ways. First, it was impossible to get at the Confederacy's logistical infrastructure without first

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defeating the Rebel field armies. It is true, as Guelzo claims, that it was the capture of Chattanooga and Atlanta that wrecked the Confederacy's war-making capacity, but to capture those places required Grant and Sherman to first fix and defeat the Confederate Army of Tennessee that barred the way to those cities.

The bloody Union victory at Shiloh was not decisive, but it led to the capture of the important rail junction at Corinth, Mississippi. Neither were the Union victories at Perryville and Murfreesboro, but they were the necessary precursors to the capture of Chattanooga, which allowed the Union to penetrate the Appalachian barrier and open the way to Atlanta.

Second, the real problem of Union generals early in the way was not that they operated under the spell of Bonaparte, but under the spell of Baron Antoine Henri Jomini, the renowned military theorist, from whom they learned that the purpose of a campaign was to maneuver an opponent out of position without actually fighting him. This was the true curse of those steeped in the military theory of the day, especially McClelland, Buell, and Halleck, who did seek to destroy the Confederacy's logistical infrastructure while avoiding battle.

Third, there *were* decisive victories in the mid-19th century: the Prussians over the Austrians at Konnigratz-Sadowa in 1866 and over the French at Sedan in 1870. In addition, there were two "near misses" by the Confederacy that could well have changed the outcome of the war: Bragg's Army of Tennessee came close to annihilating Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga and Lee came astoundingly close to victory on the second day at Gettysburg.

In my 2009 monograph on the topic of Lincoln as war president, *Abraham Lincoln: Democratic Statesmanship in War*, I claimed that Lincoln intuitively understood war in a Clausewitzian sense and that part of this understanding was that the field armies of the Confederacy constituted the "center of gravity" for the Union effort. Although there were no decisive battles of annihilation, even the war of attrition that the Civil War became required the Union to defeat Confederate field armies.

Mackubin Thomas Owens
U.S. Naval War College
Newport, RI

Allen C. Guelzo replies:

To have so many distinguished members of the Lincoln fraternity take so much trouble to comment on my mere review is, in a backhanded sort of way, the occasion for some mild swelling of the head, and not only because the comments were not, by and large, the howls of injury which are so often sent in pursuit of an offending review.

The inimitable Harry Jaffa chides me for not having anchored Lincoln more securely to the Declaration of Independence. I don't think I *entirely* neglected to make that connection, at least once. But knowing how dear that connection is to our "Harry of the West," I expect that if I'd made it twice he would have asked why I hadn't said it three times, and so on, *ad infinitum*. So let me say here that, *yes*, I *do* believe the Declaration was the central article of Lincoln's political faith, and will be honored to write that a hundred times on the blackboard as an atonement.

Eric Sands believes that the upside of the Left's suddenly discovered passion for claiming Lincoln as "ours" (as in Eric Foner's *Our Lincoln*) is the implicit acknowledgement such a passion contains of Lincoln's greatness, and through that, of the importance of statesmanship. This is an interesting and worthwhile way of looking at it; I fear only that Professor Sands is too optimistic. The Left's newly-embraced adoration of Lincoln as one of their own is, like all historical annexation, concerned less with history and more with advantageous manipulation (and here I must agree with David Blight). Likewise, I am not sure that Lincoln's practice of statesmanship, in an executive office consisting of four or five staffers and a federal budget topping out at only $1.2 billion, is going to offer anyone today, whether on the Left or the Right, much more in the way of useful instruction in statesmanship than Giotto could in painting to the Museum of Modern Art.

In something of the same spirit of Prof. Jaffa, Herman Belz wishes I had kicked Richard Hofstadter a little harder. But Belz may have failed to see in my faint praise of Hofstadter how very gleefully I've actually damned him. I applaud Hofstadter for having avoided trivializing or annexing Lincoln—not because I think Hofstadter had rightly perceived Lincoln's irrelevance or Lincoln's failure to embrace the Declaration—but precisely *because* Hofstadter understood quite clearly that Lincoln was far from irrelevant and that he *had* embraced the Declaration. Lincoln had simply accomplished this in ways Hofstadter feared and deplored. Hofstadter took Lincoln with deadly seriousness, first because he discerned in Lincoln the most powerful antidote imaginable to Hofstadter's own un-regretted Stalinism, and then because he realized that Lincoln could *not* be annexed to the Left, and so, at least in historical reputation, *had* to be repudiated. As such, Hofstadter shares common ground with that other clear-eyed critic of Lincoln, J.W. Booth, who shared more than a little common ground with Hofstadter on the subject of the 16th president, although with more lamentable results.

Professor Briggs (whom, by the way, I should lose no opportunity of praising for one of the best books ever written on the subject of Lincoln as a writer) was puzzled by my connection of Lincoln and natural law, mostly because he finds so little in Lincoln's "relativistic attitude" toward banking, currency, and extreme capitalism which seems rooted in any law except that of self-aggrandizement. This raises a caution which I have ever had to keep before me—remembering that Lincoln is a lawyer and a politician, not a philosopher, that (as Herndon said) politics was his heaven and metaphysics his Hades. Lincoln suffered under none of that impulse which governs his academic biographers, to connect every dot and align every gesture. He could, on the one hand, insist that all human actions were motivated by self-interest; but on the other, condemn those who wanted to tear up the Declaration of Independence and reduce any question about the morality of trafficking of human flesh purely to considerations of profit-and-loss.

Ultimately, however, I believe that Lincoln's purpose in promoting Whig capitalism was not self-interest *per se*, but capitalism's necessary connection to equality, self-transformation, and social mobility, which were Lincoln's real goals. The essence of a free society, Lincoln said in 1859 (and here he was pirating J.S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*), was the openness it afforded to each of its citizens to make of themselves whatever they could, without the handicap of artificial inequalities based on status, nationality, or race. One could not do this in an economic environment governed by status, racial stratification, or centralized planning. Lincoln loved the Declaration's affirmation of all men's natural equality; but that equality would be meaningless without the unfettered opportunity to use it for something. If a national bank, tariffs, and "international improvements" promoted these opportunities, then they really were serving the interests of the natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

If Briggs is worried that I have not made Lincoln enough of a moralist, my friend Mack Owens is worried that I have not made Lincoln enough of a strategist. And, indeed, because nothing succeeds like success, it does seem counter-intuitive to assert that the commander-in-chief of the victorious federal armies did not understand what he was about. But in a strictly military sense, the North won the war in spite of Lincoln—or rather, it won in spite of the prevailing Napoleonic hangover afflicting so many amateur American strate-

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gists who really did expect a Jena or an Austerlitz, and who lapsed into stab-in-the-back theories to explain why these didn't emerge from 19th-century warfare. *Contra* Prof. Owens, the logistical dimensions of the post-Napoleonic armies were exactly what made battles of annihilation so elusive, and why campaigns increasingly turned from the clash of armies to the slitting of supply throats. The Crimean War was the first great warning of this development, when despite Allied victories at the Alma, Balaklava, and Inkerman, the Allies nearly perished on the vine in front of Sevastopol. And I have to say that neither Königgratz nor Sedan were really victories of annihilation. Not only did Benedek and most of the Army of the North survive to fight another day, but the Austrians had another entire field army—the Army of the South—fresh from victory at Custozza, to assist them. And Sedan may have wiped out an entire French field army (with the hapless Napoleon III thrown in as a prize), but the Franco-Prussian War dragged on into another year after Sedan, largely because Paris had to be reduced by siege before the war could end.

For Lincoln to imagine that George McClellan was holding back from winning a single-shot, decisive victory on the Peninsula or at Antietam simply because he had ulterior political motives was naïve at best; but pushing Burnside, Hooker, and Meade to attempt the same thing was lethal at worst. It was not until the advent of Ulysses Grant in 1864 that Lincoln (as he himself admitted) stopped trying to micro-manage the war in Virginia; and Grant, of course, succeeded only after he transferred his operations to the James River and began essentially the same siege of Richmond that McClellan had proposed two years earlier.

In truth, I have been no more than jousting in a friendly way with Messrs. Jaffa, Sands, Belz, Briggs, and Owens, their disagreements being more matters of shape rather than substance. The same cannot be said of David Blight, whose objections to my dismissal of Foner's *Our Lincoln* anthology in general, and Blight's contribution to it in particular, come down to the commission of two imaginary crimes.

Professor Blight objects to my "contempt" for the "self-emancipation" thesis, first because I ignore the evidence for it, then because I misconstrue his embrace of it, and finally because I am mistaken about its origins. Vincent Harding, in 1981, may be regarded as a precursor of the "self-emancipation thesis," but Barbara J. Fields gave it common currency through Ken Burns's Civil War series; it certainly shows up no earlier than that in Blight's work. However we date it, the essence of the thesis is that the slaves really emancipated themselves—by running away, by joining Union armies, and not "from words on paper, either the words of Congress or those of the President." Its real purpose, I suspect, is to enhance "black agency," by removing from the consciousness of modern African-Americans any sense of debt owed to white Union soldiers, a white president, or white people in general. It is Stokely Carmichael *manqué*, and its chief virtue is the cultivation of racial self-esteem.

Like many self-esteem projects, however, it tends to function in a vacuum of evidence. No one has ever determined how many slaves took the occasion of the outbreak of the Civil War to leave their masters; the creation of a freedmens' bureau and freedmens' camps did not begin until 1862, and even then tallies of the numbers of so-called "contrabands" were infrequent and far from comprehensive. At the end of the war, William H. Seward guessed—and did no more than guess—that maybe 200,000 slaves had made their way to freedom on their own; but that would amount to no more than 5% of the enslaved population. Blight triumphantly points to two fugitive slave narratives he has recently edited and published as though they were the clinch of the "self-emancipation thesis"—without entirely realizing that two is an even more meager estimate than Seward's. The freedmen who appeared before the 38th Congress's Joint Committee on Reconstruction in 1866 testified that they were freed "when the proclamation was issued," that "under the Proclamation of the President of the United States, I consider myself a Free Man," and that "I have been a slave from my childhood up to the time I was set free by the emancipation proclamation." Reading this kind of testimony about the importance of the Proclamation from the mouths of freed slaves is the sort of thing which impresses the proponents of the "self-emancipation thesis" so greatly that they are liable to give up reading altogether.

But what Blight misses, and much more substantially, is that even if 50% or 90% of the slaves had fled freedomward, this would only have made them free in a *de facto* sense; like an escapee from a prison, they might be at large, but they would actually be only fugitives, and liable at any moment to rendition. What transformed simple fugitives—or any slave, for that matter—into free men was a *de jure* transformation *out* of slavery. That could have come in 1862 only through a presidential "war powers" proclamation, a constitutional amendment, or by state legislative action. Lincoln pled for the last of these and didn't get it; the second could not be cajoled out of the 37th Congress; so Lincoln resorted to the proclamation. But that *was* the key. The Emancipation Proclamation changed the slaves' legal standing at one massive, liberty-making stroke, and *that* was what made for freedom. The answer, then, to the question of who freed the slaves is not the slaves, and not even (as Blight tries to temporize) *both* the slaves and Lincoln. It was Lincoln's task—and Lincoln did it. This may not work to promote anyone else's self-esteem, but it did wonders for providing freedom.

My second "crime" and the problem which really seems to bring the froth to Blight's lips, is my disenchantment with the turn his essay took toward damning modern-day Republicans for draping themselves in Lincoln's mantle when they have, by his reckoning, plumbed the depths of the "scurrilous, deceptive and sometimes frankly racist" in their "faded efforts to appeal to African-American voters." Lincoln, we should know, was really a believer in "activist government," while modern Republicans "have hardly been the emancipators of their era." Perhaps Blight can explain why an appeal to African-American voters is "racist" (as opposed to, say, ignoring or excluding them), or by what inattention these scurrilously racist Republicans installed the first African-American secretary of state and national security advisor, appointed a black Supreme Court justice, elected the first black U.S. senator since Reconstruction, and sent the troops into Little Rock. Perhaps Blight does not believe that these were real black people, but were instead like Cinderella's frogs, masquerading as sprightly coachmen. The difficulty is that he offers no reason why I should not regard his dismissal of the "faded effort" of Mehlman, Rove, *et al.* as "ridiculous, ahistorical propaganda" as itself a piece of ridiculous, ahistorical propaganda. Blight certainly has the right to rant; but not the privilege to claim that one can rant and do history at the same time. Yes, I did pull short of belaboring "that part" of his essay because, indeed, I did not see this as my "responsibility as a historian." But one of us had to.

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THE MEANING OF THE TEA PARTY

Essay by William Voegeli

ONE POINT ABOUT THE TEA PARTY MOVEment is not in dispute: it was triggered on the morning of February 19, 2009, by Rick Santelli, a correspondent for CNBC. Speaking from the trading floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, Santelli responded to a question from his studio anchors by denouncing a proposed $75 billion government program to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. As the traders around him began to look up from their computers to listen, then to applaud and cheer, Santelli turned to them and asked, "How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage who has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills?" Getting more worked up, Santelli said, "We're thinking about having a Chicago tea party in July. All of you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm going to start organizing it."

Santelli, it turned out, didn't need to do any organizing, or to wait five months for people to take action. The Tea Party movement was born. CNBC and YouTube viewers launched websites and Facebook pages within hours of the rant heard 'round the world. Within weeks, a new factor in American politics emerged, a "right-wing street-protest movement," according to the liberal journalist Michael Tomasky, something unprecedented in modern American politics. Following Santelli's famous outburst the Tea Party movement "materialized...out of nowhere," Tomasky reported forthrightly but regretfully, "with an intensity no one would have predicted." As one consequence, "the degree to which self-identified independent voters flipped on health care...from support to opposition, in part because of the toxic town-hall protests, was astonishing."

What are the questions about the Tea Party movement that remain open for debate? Those would include...everything else. Depending on which analyst you favor, the movement is either "part of a very big wave" or already starting to burn itself out. The Tea Party activists are either reviving the nation's founding principles, or the anti-intellectualism, extremism, and paranoia said to be constantly latent in American politics. Its members are either the direct descendants of the Ross Perot voters from the 1992 presidential campaign, or have little in common with them. It is a spontaneous grassroots phenomenon, or an example of political "Astroturf." It poses grave dangers for the Republican Party, or is the GOP's salvation. The Tea Party movement has lost interest in the culture wars and social issues that energized conservative politics for the past 45 years, or is composed of people who haven't yielded an inch on those questions.

The lamest answer on these points is also the wisest: time will tell. An unforeseen burst of political engagement, still in the process of sorting itself out as it enters its second year, is not going to reveal its ultimate character and goals so readily. The phenomenon is especially hard to describe precisely because it is so decentralized, a movement with "no headquarters to visit, no chairman, no written platform and no chosen candidate," as *Time* magazine observed.

Cult and Anti-Cult

IT'S NOT TOO EARLY TO VENTURE SOME TENtative explanations, however. The Tea Party movement caught fire one month after Barack Obama's inauguration. It is, in part, a reaction to the Obama presidential campaign and its accompanying cult of personality. It is also a reaction to the Obama Administration's effort to keep the financial crisis from going to waste by using it to enact an agenda of "shock and awe statism," to borrow a phrase from Governor Mitch Daniels of Indiana.

There are clear signs, though, that the Tea Party movement cannot be summed up by its relation to the dawning of the Age of Obama. It emerged at the culmination of the long project to supplant a ruling class based on social position and wealth with one based on brains. The new meritocrats who direct our government, economy, and national discourse are being disparaged at Tea Party meetings and blogs by the people whom they govern. This is an important, unexpected development—the democratic repudiation of the consequences that have followed from the successful effort to democratize entrée to the nation's highest circles of power.

To begin with, the contemptuous and sometimes ugly denunciations of Obama by his detractors are the counterpart to the rapturous

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and sometimes creepy testimonials to Obama by his supporters. Ezra Klein of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, for example, has analyzed the health care debate in a series of articles that have been highly opinionated but also highly informed. He is, in other words, neither a lightweight nor a loon. It's all the more telling, then, that Klein was able to write an assessment of Obama's victory speech after the Iowa caucuses in January 2008 that became as famous as it was fatuous:

> Obama's finest speeches do not excite. They do not inform. They don't even really inspire. They *elevate*. They enmesh you in a grander moment, as if history has stopped flowing passively by, and, just for an instant, contracted around you, made you aware of its presence, and your role in it. He is not the Word made flesh, but the triumph of word *over* flesh, over color, over despair.... Obama is, at his best, able to call us back to our highest selves, to the place where America exists as a glittering ideal, and where we, its honored inhabitants, seem capable of achieving it, and thus of sharing in its meaning and transcendence.

Or, as a less politically sophisticated but no less besotted analyst, actor Will Smith, said last year, "Barack Obama as an idea marks an evolutionary flash point for humanity."

The Tea Party movement presents itself as an anti-cult not only because many people in it find such extravagant praise of a still unproven politician absurd and insufferable, but because of increasing evidence that Obama himself believes, like Mae West, that too much of a good thing is wonderful. As political scientist James Ceaser recently observed,

> Only the most rare of persons, after being the object for over a year of such unrelenting adulation, could have resisted the temptation to think that the world revolved around him. Barack Obama is clearly not that person. His speeches and remarks are filled with references to himself in a ratio that surpasses anything yet seen in the history of the American presidency.

The hyper-competitive types who survive and triumph in campaigns that become more grueling every four years do not climb that long hill in order to serve a term or two as hold-the-fort, B+ presidents. As soon as they've bested all their living political opponents they begin competing against their dead predecessors in the historical greatness derby.

Undeliverable Promises

Barack Obama has an especially bad case of Rushmore Fever. Simply by being the first black president he becomes a monument in America's tortured racial history. But that is only the prelude. The goal of his presidency, recently summarized by David Brooks in the *New York Times*, is to "usher in the third great wave of Democratic reform," after FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society, "transforming health care, energy, education, financial regulation and many other sectors of American life."

As Charles Kesler explained in these pages ("The Audacity of Barack Obama," Fall 2008), the key to this transformation is the replacement of cynicism with hope. Purging cynicism will transform our political process, making it solicitous toward ordinary citizens rather than powerful insiders. Those transformed processes, in turn, will lead to dramatically better and fairer policy results, as the people's elected representatives openly conduct the people's business.

In a debate in January 2008, for example, Obama described how his administration would approach health care reform: "Not negotiating behind closed doors, but bringing all parties together, and broadcasting those negotiations on C-SPAN, so that the American people can see what the choices are, because part of what we have to do is enlist the American people in this process." He repeated this promise several times during his campaign. When delivered in speeches, it always drew loud cheers.

A moment's reflection, however, will show that any such promise is unachievable. The moment you begin to televise negotiations over a major piece of legislation, the proceedings you televise cease to be negotiations. They become, instead, campaign speeches and posturing (as we saw in February 2010 during the president's health care summit with congressional leaders). The real negotiations move to a room without TV cameras and microphones.

Any promise that can't conceivably be kept is one that never should have been made. There are only two possibilities—either the president never understood the futility of televising health care reform negotiations, or he always understood it. It's as hard to know which explanation is true as it is to decide which is worse. If Barack Obama spent two years campaigning to be president without doubting the feasibility of negotiating important public policy on a television show, then he really was as callow and ill-prepared as Hillary Clinton's "3 a.m. phone call" ad alleged.

If, on the other hand, he *always* knew that health care reform legislation would not and could not be hammered out on television, then Obama is not only brazen in ways that compare impressively to other people in his line of work, but stands condemned by the far more exacting standards by which he invited the voters to judge him. In November 2007 at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Des Moines, Obama gave a speech that propelled him to victory in the Iowa caucuses and, from there, to the nomination and the White House. He spoke of the need to address voters "who've lost trust in their government, but want to believe again" by realizing that "telling the American people what we think they want to hear instead of telling the American people what they need to hear just won't do." If Obama's inner council understood all along that the candidate's risible C-SPAN promise would have to be shunted aside after the inauguration, then his campaign was the latest validation of the Code for Modern Living: every time you're ready to conclude that you've become too cynical, the world finds a way to teach you that the real problem is that you haven't been cynical enough.

More Irresponsibility

At a similar, I'm-not-like-all-the-others moment in his courtship of the electorate, Obama made a point in his Denver acceptance speech of denouncing political opponents who "claim that our insistence on something larger, something firmer and more honest in our public life is just a Trojan Horse for higher taxes." The Democratic nominee, of course, made another campaign commitment on that subject, as categorically and frequently as he promised to televise health care negotiations. "I can make a firm pledge," candidate Obama said two months before the election. "Under my plan, no family making less than $250,000 a year will see any form of tax increase. Not your income tax, not your payroll tax, not your capital gains taxes, not any of your taxes." All of 15 months later, President Obama told a *BusinessWeek* interviewer that he would have to be "agnostic" on the question of raising taxes on families making less than $250,000 per year if his new commission on reducing the deficit would have any chance to make a difference:

> What I can't do is to set the thing up where a whole bunch of things are off the table. Some would say we can't look at entitlements. There are going to be some that say we can't look at taxes, and pretty soon, you just can't solve the problem.

The question, again, is whether candidate Obama was dim-witted or cold-blooded. Did he really not understand—was there no economist on his campaign staff to help him understand—

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that all the expensive new things he promised government would do could not possibly be reconciled to his promises to exempt 97% of the population from any new tax increases? Or was he agnostic all along about his solemn promises, winking in the mirror and chuckling before going out to intone them to the crowds of supporters who stood, cheered, and wept as they beheld, at last, a politician personifying change they could believe in?

A candidate determined to tell the voters what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear would, by contrast, acknowledge—explicitly, repeatedly, and forcefully—the fiscal reality that will dominate American politics until the last baby boomer's ashes are scattered at Woodstock: our government has promised its people entitlement benefits that exceed, by several GDP percentage points, the tax revenues it has prepared those people to surrender. Realistically, the only way to square our spending promises with our taxing promises is to break the one or the other, or to bend them both, arriving at some politically feasible and economically sustainable mixture of spending cuts and tax increases. Having gotten comfortable in the White House, Obama has started to get comfortable directing the people's attention to this grim, inescapable reality.

The problem is that cleaning up the nation's balance sheet is a lamentably pedestrian mission for a world-historical figure. Worse still, getting out from under the debts created by the New Deal and Great Society programs works against Obama's efforts to launch his own ambitious, third-wave Epoch of Hope. The president's ungainly response to this dilemma has been to concentrate the nation's mind on figuring out how to pay for all the unaffordable promises that were made decades ago...right after one more batch of unaffordable promises is added to the existing stack of IOUs. In his inaugural address Obama promised a "new era of responsibility," and then made clear in his first months in office that it would commence only after another long, indulgent season of irresponsibility.

Too Good to Be True

Obamanauts in politics and the press would, of course, dispute this characterization. In the time-honored tradition of Democratic rhetoric, new programs never merely cover their costs, but are lauded because they will "pay for themselves many times over." Thus, President Obama insisted that he will not sign a health bill that adds "even one dime to our deficit over the next decade," after which it "must also slow the growth of health care costs, while improving care, in the long run." Indeed, not only can we afford to extend health protection to tens of millions of uninsured people, we cannot afford *not* to. In a speech to Congress on February 24, 2009 the president said that securing "quality, affordable health care for every American" was "a step we *must take* if we hope to bring down our deficit in the years to come" (emphasis added).

The Tea Party movement did not ignite *that* quickly—we may safely assume that President Obama's nationally televised address had other purposes than putting out the fires Rick Santelli had lit five days earlier. There's an important connection, however, between the "Who says you can't have it all?" logic employed by the Obama Administration to sell its health care initiatives, and the swift, categorical repudiation of his agenda by the Tea Party movement. Obama's difficult first year in office suggests the limits to what soaring rhetoric can accomplish once the campaigning is over, and even its drawbacks for selling policies and building coalitions. No matter how lucidly he phrases the point, or confidently he delivers the arguments, the president has not been able to talk citizens out of their skepticism about policy proposals that appear, to the untrained eye, beset with contradictions. In August 2009 Ramesh Ponnuru wrote in *Time* that the "fatal flaw of Obamacare" was that the people simply did not understand the president's argument that our health care system was an "untenable" disaster that was "bankrupting" our families, businesses, and government, at the same time he was promising that his sweeping changes would permit every American who is "happy with your plan and your doctor" to continue those health care arrangements indefinitely.

Even *Newsweek*, which covered Obama throughout 2008 and 2009 with the same abrading skepticism *Tiger Beat* inflicts on the Jonas Brothers, recently said that it was "dodgy" for Obama to sell health care reform by claiming we can extend health insurance to more than 30 million people who lack it today while simultaneously and painlessly reducing the nation's overall health care bill. "It's possible to have universal health care," the magazine argued, "to have high-quality health care, to have the freedom to choose your own doctor, and to save money on health care, but it is not possible to do all those things at once.... The public right away sensed that the president wasn't leveling with them."

More than the fear that the Obama agenda is expensive or wrongheaded, *this* belief, that the policies are being advertised disingenuously and deceitfully, explains the growing difficulties facing Obama and the Democrats, and the rapid rise of the Tea Party movement. Those obstacles, however, did not dissuade Democrats, determined to use the large congressional majorities they built up in 2006 and 2008, from enacting their health care reform plan, despite its contradictions and the public's resulting antipathy. Republican Scott Brown's victory in the special election for the Massachusetts Senate seat held by a Kennedy family member or retainer since 1952 did not deter the Democrats, even though Brown emphasized his opposition to health care reform over all other issues in a state that Obama had carried with 62% of the vote 15 months earlier. Nor were the Democrats impressed by nine national public opinion surveys taken before Congress voted in March, all of which showed more Americans opposed to the health care plan than in favor of it, by margins ranging from 2 to 20% and averaging 10.5%.

To enact a sweeping new program despite such wide and deep opposition would, before 2010, have been unthinkable, or at least un-American. *The Atlantic*'s Clive Crook favored Obamacare, yet found its victory remarkable and troubling. This was how European governments behaved, he wrote, but not American ones:

> Germany's government abolished its currency and forced the euro on a country that was opposed to monetary union throughout, saying, "You are wrong. We know better. We will do this regardless, and you will come to like it." Can you imagine such a thing happening in the U.S., I used to ask?

Our Meritocratic Masters

The Tea Party scorn for the president's promises that all his transformative plans won't hurt a bit is about Obama, but also about something bigger. The voters are particularly unreceptive to presidential promises that sound too good to be true, because they have lived to regret listening to other such promises. Those promises were made by leaders of the new meritocracy, the one described by Brooks, in his comic sociology mode, as the "valedictocracy," populated by "Achievatrons" who "got double 800s on their SATs."

Without judging the validity of its complaint, Brooks asserts that the Tea Party movement is made up of people who "are against the concentrated power of the educated class. They believe big government, big business, big media and the affluent professionals are merging to form a self-serving oligarchy—with bloated government, unsustainable deficits, high taxes and intrusive regulation."

We can be less impartial. The sociological but not very comic reality is that Brooks's Achievatrons wound up being distrusted by millions of their countrymen the old-fashioned way—they

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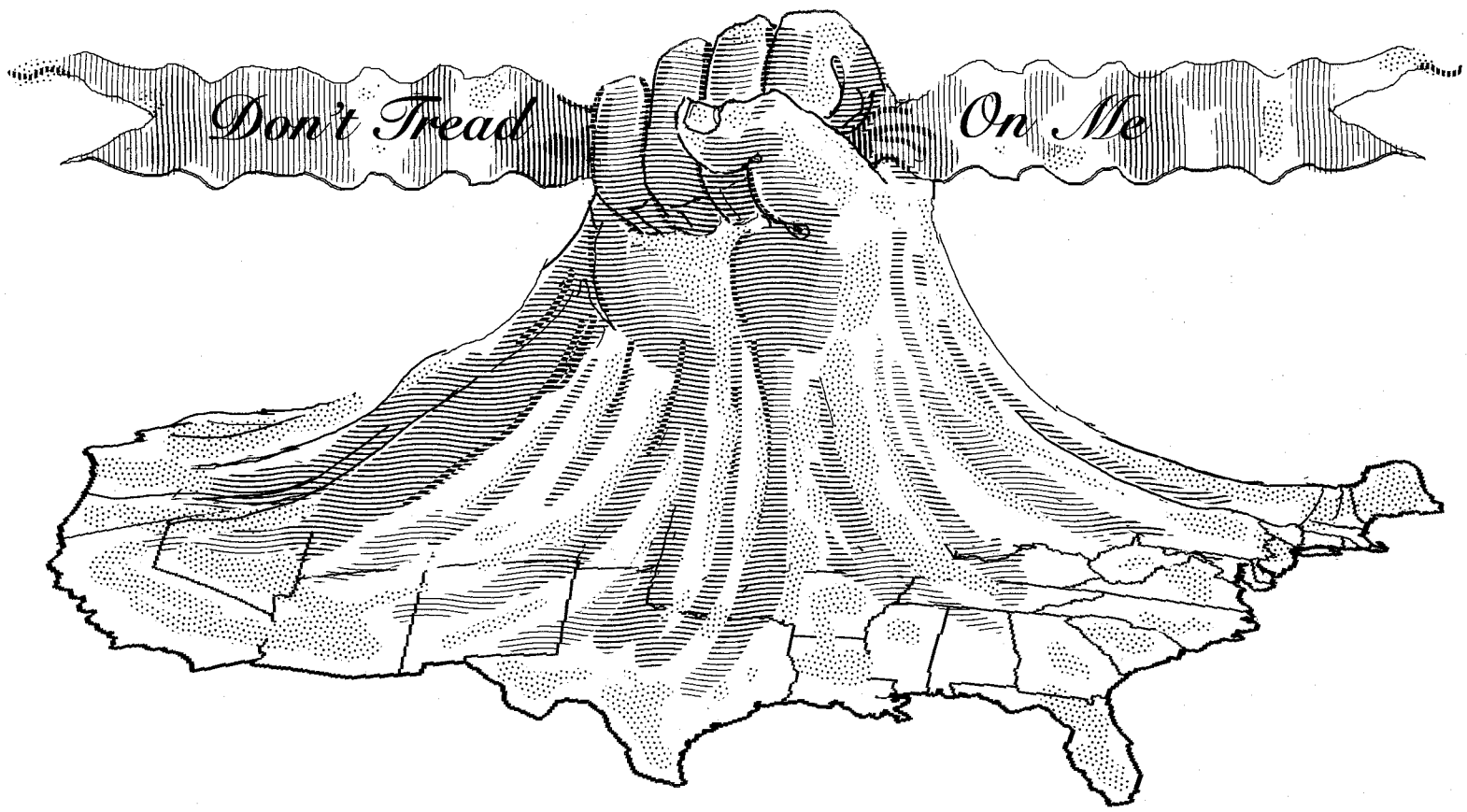

earned it. Our new meritocratic masters have been more conspicuously smart than wise. They know a lot, but don't know what they don't know. Their self-regard as the modern Americans who are the "natural aristocrats" Jefferson looked for has left them with an exaggerated sense of their own *noblesse*, and a deficient awareness of their corresponding *oblige*. Their expectation that the rest of us will be deferential to their expertise, like citizens of European nations that are social but not especially political democracies, has triggered the Tea Party backlash, and the resurgence of the "Don't Tread on Me" spirit.

As a result, eloquent promises about how government can be expanded to the benefit of all while taxes are increased only for a very few, and how ingenious new programs can make health care simultaneously more extensive and less expensive, are setting off alarms. These assurances—that when common sense tells us that something isn't possible while expert analysis tells us that it is, our common sense is the thing that needs to be adjusted—sound ominously familiar. Wasn't it just the other day that brainiacs with MBAs were telling us that, no, it was *not* dangerous for people with modest incomes to purchase expensive houses with zero-down, adjustable-rate mortgages? Since we didn't go to Wharton and weren't conversant with the esoteric innovations in financial derivatives and securitization that had taken the risk out of taking risks, we didn't know enough to set aside our unfounded fears that all this highly leveraged borrowing would end badly.

Sometimes the valedictocracy's repudiation of common sense works in the opposite direction: expert analysis shows how things that sound attainable to most people, largely because they *were* attained routinely for many years, are in reality extraordinarily difficult. Any nation worthy of the name has to defend its territorial integrity, for instance. Doing so includes securing its borders and making clear, consequential distinctions between what will be expected from and by its residents based on whether they are citizens, legal aliens, or illegal aliens. For most of its history, America was not baffled or overwhelmed by the imperative to discharge these fundamental responsibilities. In recent decades, however, the bright lines on the map and in the law that distinguish our country and people from others have become mysteriously blurry and unenforceable.

One effect of this newfound incompetency is that those who are least like the Achievatrons—people who didn't go to college or even finish high school—are forced to compete in the domestic as well as the global labor market against foreign workers. One cause of it is that Achievatrons know the names of Tuscan villages that haven't been discovered by tourists but don't know the name of a single person who really needs a job at a meat-packing plant or cleaning hotel rooms. And because they don't know any such Americans they find it easy to conclude that there *are* no such Americans, leaving us no choice but to import the labor we need for those tasks. The resulting analytical framework renders illegal immigration a victimless crime, since the only jobs immigrants take are ones for which no American citizen can be hired. Paul Krugman, of all people, has disparaged this consensus, labeling as "intellectually dishonest" the canard that "immigrants do 'jobs that Americans will not do.'" To the contrary, "The willingness of Americans to do a job depends on how much that job pays—and the reason some jobs pay too little to attract native-born Americans is competition from poorly paid immigrants."

Comprehensive Reforms

Whether considering claims that it is possible for the government to do much more than common sense would suggest, as in health care, or much less, as in immigration, the meritocracy's magic word for framing how the nation must deal with its problems is "comprehensive." For one thing, comprehensive reforms give maximum scope for the valedictocracy to implement sweeping changes based on recent academic findings. In June 2009, for example, the Council of Economic Advisors cited studies by the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice in a report claiming that "nearly 30 percent of Medicare's costs could be saved without adverse health consequences." Moreover, if the changes that would capture those wasted expenditures could be applied to all health care outside of Medicare, the result would be to reduce health care spending from 18 to 13% of GDP. It was left to the liber-

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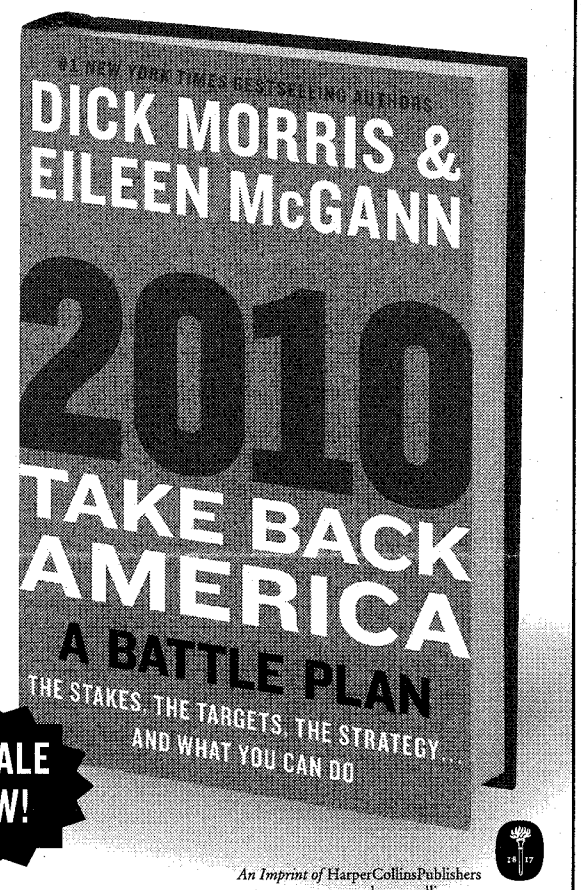

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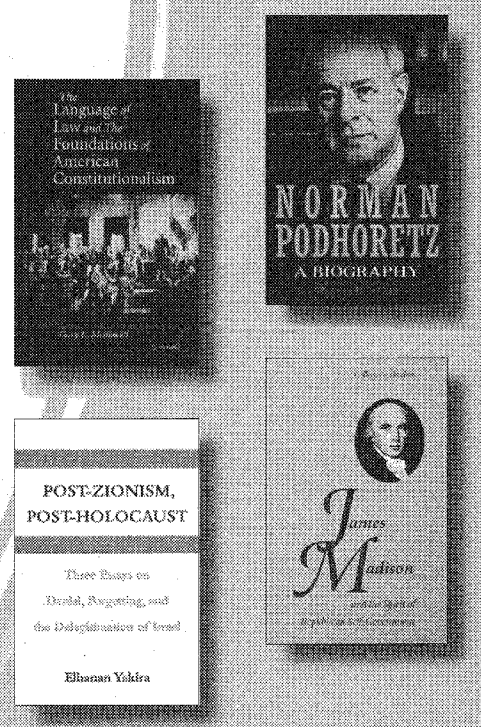

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tarian blogger Virginia Postrel to "wonder why a report that claims that Medicare is wasting 30 percent of its spending thinks it's making a case for making the rest of the health care system more like Medicare." In other words, if we *are* wasting 30% of our Medicare outlays, why don't we apply a new set of ambitious reforms to Medicare *first*, and *see* whether or not they work, rather than just *assume* they'll work and apply them to the entire health care system?

To Postrel's sensible question, Peter Orszag, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, replied that reforming Medicare before moving on to the rest of the health care system was politically impossible. The American Association of Retired Persons, according to Orszag, had made clear that the only way it would tolerate "aggressive" and "significant changes" in Medicare would be in return for expanded health care coverage. It will be noted that the changes Obamacare promised were never presented as being aggressive, or even all that significant. In a July 2009 press conference, for example, the president tried to reduce the issue's complexities to simple terms the rest of us could understand: "If there's a blue pill and a red pill, and the blue pill is half the price of the red pill and works just as well, why not pay half price for the thing that's going to make you well?"

The campaign for Obamacare will continue after its enactment, due to its unpopularity. The early indications, however, are that Democrats won't alter the public relations strategy that made their reforms so unpopular in the first place. After the bill passed, Clive Crook called "an insult to one's intelligence" both Speaker Nancy Pelosi's claim that reducing Medicare's outlays would improve its performance and President Obama's that insuring 32 million more Americans was, first and foremost, a way to reduce health care spending.

Comprehensiveness serves another meritocratic need. When the unenlightened want changes the Achievatrons don't, and vice versa, insisting that comprehensive reform is the only path forward has the effect of stipulating that changes the masses want cannot be disaggregated from, and are going to be held hostage to, changes the valedictocracy has decided are necessary. Securing the nation's borders and enforcing its immigration laws, accordingly, is not "viable" as a stand-alone option. It can only work, reform advocates have stated over and over, as part of a package that "normalizes" the status of "undocumented" workers, giving them a way "out of the shadows" and toward full citizenship. As with health care, the notion that we can address one issue *and then* another, taking our bearings by analyzing the practical consequences of incremental steps rather than implementing entire systemic theories, is ruled to be somehow out of order.

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The meritocratic fallback position, when the package deal doesn't fly, is to comply with the popularly demanded policy reforms in the most complicated way possible, as opposed to the most direct way. If you didn't know better you'd almost think they were trying to sabotage the policy measures they opposed but couldn't thwart. Thus, complaints that the border between Mexico and America was intolerably porous led to an elaborate project for an electronic "fence" relying on radar, cameras, and satellite signals. The director of the project at the Department of Homeland Security recently told the *Los Angeles Times*, apparently with a straight face, "It was a great idea, but it didn't work." While Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has ordered "a department-wide assessment" of the project, a spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a restrictionist group, says, "Instead of spending a lot of time reassessing, they should get out there and do the sorts of things we know work effectively to get control of the border, such as double fencing and more manpower."

Disrespectful and Ineffectual

The disjunction between the achievatrons and the middle-of-the-bell-curve masses does not replicate the divide between Democrats and Republicans, or between liberals and conservatives. Immigration, for example, is a divisive and tricky issue within the coalitions of both the Left and the Right. And though Wall Street has remained predominantly Republican as graduates of the best business schools have replaced sons of the best families in the corner offices, Democrats are far from a beleaguered or trivial minority. After leaving the Clinton White House in 1998, for example, Rahm Emanuel took a sabbatical from politics to be a managing director for the investment firm Wasserstein Perella. Emanuel felt he "needed money so that wouldn't be a problem while he was doing public service," his brother told *Fortune* magazine. Two years and $16 million later, problem solved; Emanuel left investment banking to run for Congress from Chicago, where he served until becoming President Obama's chief of staff.

The president's own place within the transformed American class structure is equally interesting. He is a graduate of Columbia and Harvard Law School, married to a graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law. His mother had a doctorate in anthropology, his father was a Harvard-trained economist, and the grandmother who raised him in Hawaii was a bank vice president. John Judis of the *New Republic* notes, "After graduating from law school, [Obama] joined a prestigious Chicago law firm with offices just off Michigan Avenue. In 1991, he began teaching constitutional law at the University of Chicago. He was chair of a Chicago branch of the Annenberg Foundation."

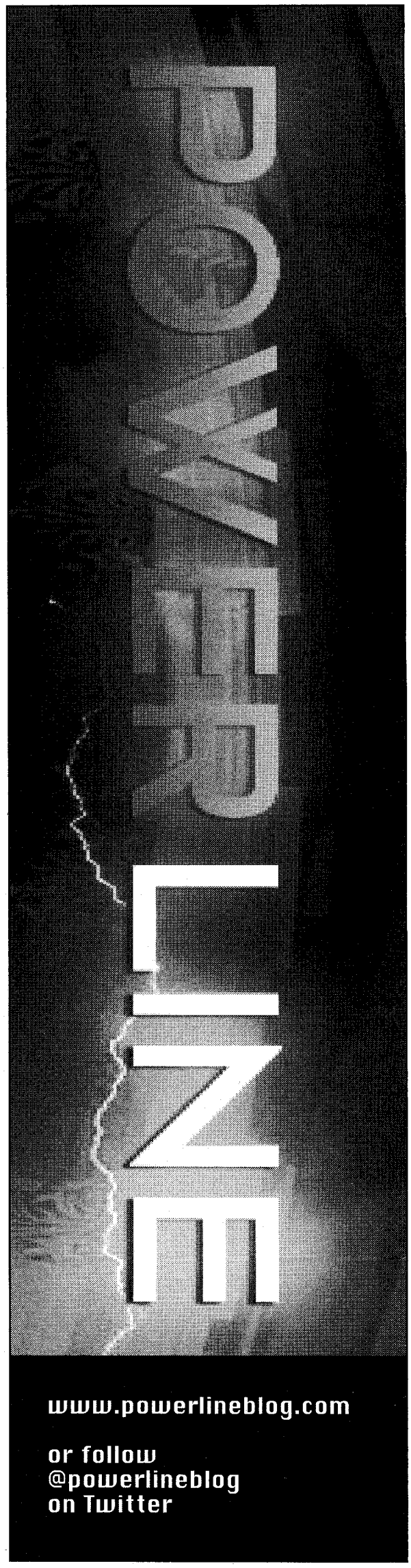
Had it been important for Obama to retain his ties to working-class Chicago after he decided to quit community organizing, he could have gone to law schools in the city like Kent or John Marshall. Instead, writes Judis, he chose educational and career paths that differentiated him from "a working- or middle-class American for whom being a civil rights lawyer or professor or politician is at best a passing fantasy." The gulf is as hard to traverse in the other direction:

> Once out of law school, Obama lived and worked over the next decade in a gray area between the very upper reaches of professional America and the country's managers, owners, and rulers. He didn't just have access to more money and live differently from ordinary Americans; he possessed power and authority that they didn't have. He was of a different world, even if as a politician he would occasionally visit theirs.

Obama, then, comes naturally by his detachment from the people he governs. It was at a fundraiser in San Francisco in April 2008 that he uttered his famous remarks about bitter Americans who cling to guns and religion. In context, the remarks show him to be more sympathetic than disparaging, but trying, as well, to make sense of the inner life of an exotic tribe for a gathering of fellow anthropologists who are likewise unfamiliar with its outlook and folkways:

> You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's replaced them. And they fell through the Clinton Administration, and the Bush Administration, and each successive administration has said that somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not. And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations.

The Tea Party movement's grievance against the Eternal Valedictorians cannot be reduced to the lingering grudges of those who took a remedial class here and there against those who enrolled in Advanced Placement Everything. Obama got it basically right in San Francisco before he got it



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gruesomely wrong. A leadership class that actually improved ordinary Americans' security and opportunities would be forgiven condescension worse than Obama's. It's when the people running the country are both disrespectful *and* ineffectual that folks get angry.

That anger will culminate in the replacement of America's "entire political establishment," Herbert Meyer, an intelligence official in the Reagan Administration, recently argued on the conservative website, *American Thinker*. The Tea Party movement, driven by the belief "that character is more important than personality, that education isn't the same thing as judgment, and that expertise without common sense is dangerous," will spearhead the replacement of the existing governing cohort with "a wholly new establishment," wrote Meyer.

Government of the People

If this is indeed what the Tea Party movement achieves, or even attempts, it will count as one audacious switcheroo, especially since it's not clear that America has a relief establishment warming up in the bullpen. The country's last establishment swap saw the replacement of what the journalist Nicholas Lemann called "the Episcopacy" with the meritocracy. It was, importantly, a revolution from above. "From the 1880s to the 1960s," in David Frum's useful summary, "the American governing elite was drawn from the distinguished families of New England and New York, promoted by friendships and family connections to the high offices of the land." The Episcopacy had a strong sense of its social obligations, which culminated in the realization that its aristocratic position in a democratic nation was anomalous and ultimately untenable. As recounted by Lemann in *The Big Test* (1999) and Geoffrey Kabaservice in *The Guardians* (2004), the Episcopacy's final public service was to commit mass-suicide. It intentionally transformed famous colleges from finishing schools for gentlemen into institutions that vetted bright, talented kids from throughout the social order, then equipped them with the training and, equally important, the self-assurance necessary to handle the country's highest responsibilities. As a result, writes Frum, today's "governing class is a meritocratic elite. For most members of this elite, the decisive event in their lives was the arrival in the mail of an acceptance packet from a great university."

If the Tea Party movement wants a new establishment to replace the Achievatrons, it's going to find that the current establishment, unlike the Episcopacy, is not the least bit conflicted about its right to run the country. As the late Christopher Lasch wrote in *The Revolt of the Elites* (1995), "Meritocracy is a parody of democracy.... Social mobility does not undermine the influence of elites; if anything, it helps to solidify their influence by supporting the illusion that it rests solely on merit." The Eternal Valedictorians don't suffer fools gladly, and are quick to conclude that anyone who disagrees with them is a fool. Questions about their judgments are challenges to their intelligence and expertise, which, in turn, form the entire basis for their vast self-regard and the privileged, powerful lives they lead. According to Lasch:

> When confronted with resistance to [their] initiatives, they betray the venomous hatred that lies not far beneath the smiling face of upper-middle-class benevolence. Opposition makes humanitarians forget the liberal virtues they claim to uphold. They become petulant, self-righteous, intolerant. In the heat of political controversy, they find it impossible to conceal their contempt for those who stubbornly refuse to see the light—those who "just don't get it," in the self-satisfied jargon of political rectitude.

Unlike the Episcopacy, then, the valedictocracy will not go quietly, and it will not groom its successor. Before settling on the convulsive course of evicting the Achievatrons from their positions of power, the Tea Party movement would be well-advised to continue reflecting on whether America's problem is *this* establishment or *an* establishment. An alternative reading of what the Tea Party movement does and should want is not a better establishment but a less autonomous establishment, subject to the checks and balances of a re-engaged citizenry and a reinvigorated Constitution that constrains its discretion. Steven Hayward identified the problem in the first volume of *The Age of Reagan* (2001):

> The premise of the administrative state is that our public problems are *complicated*, with "no easy answers," whose remedy requires sophisticated legislation and extensive bureaucratic management.... But the creed of the administrative state makes the idea of citizen self-government seem quaint or obsolete, and it causes our government to be remote and esoteric to average citizens.

Few would endorse this desiccation of republicanism in principle, but many Americans might be willing to accept it in practice—*if* the clerisy managing our administrative state were actually handling our complicated problems with a degree of success commensurate to their status and power. When, however, our elites are better at being elitist than being effective, outsourcing our governance to them loses all appeal. That is why, according to another writer for *American Thinker*, Larrey Anderson, the essence of the Tea Party movement is "populist Constitutionalism." Whatever their other differences, its "divergent groups agree that the federal government has, over the last several decades, stepped further and further outside of the bounds of the Constitution."

A Visible Destination

The Tea Party movement, thus understood, has a natural affinity with, if you'll permit a parochial observation, the Claremont Institute, which antedates the movement by 30 years, and was created to restore the principles of the American Founding to their rightful, preeminent authority in our national life. This orientation means the Tea Party movement has the potential to be a vessel for a conservatism committed to conserving political blessings that are unqualifiedly *American*. What's more, implicit in the project of the political restoration of a rightful authority is the identification and defeat of the ideas and practices that have wrongfully usurped those founding principles. To this end, scholars such as Ronald J. Pestritto and Matthew Spalding, both Claremont Institute fellows, have painstakingly shown how 19th-century progressivism made 20th- and 21st-century liberalism both possible and dangerous.

The Tea Party movement has before it, then, a principled and intellectually coherent project. A visible destination can do very much to help a political movement navigate the treacherous ground before it—but only so much. Despite liberalism's contradictions and deceptions, "You've got a problem? We've got a program!" remains politically seductive. Barry Goldwater's alternative, "You've got a problem? We've got a philosophy!" still looks, however, like the phrase to launch a thousand concession speeches. A conservative candidate who recently got to give a victory speech was Bob McDonnell, the Republican elected governor of Virginia in November 2009. The key, as one party strategist explained to Ramesh Ponnuru, was that McDonnell was able to "finish the sentence" by presenting a "very vigorous policy agenda." So, "Instead of just saying that we have to keep taxes and spending low, and thus pleasing conservatives...McDonnell explained how these policies would create jobs and 'plug the hole in Richmond.'"

Walter Russell Mead of the Council on Foreign Relations explains the resulting tension, the one the Tea Party movement must resolve if it is to succeed. The movement's "ruling passion is a belief in the ability of the ordinary citizen

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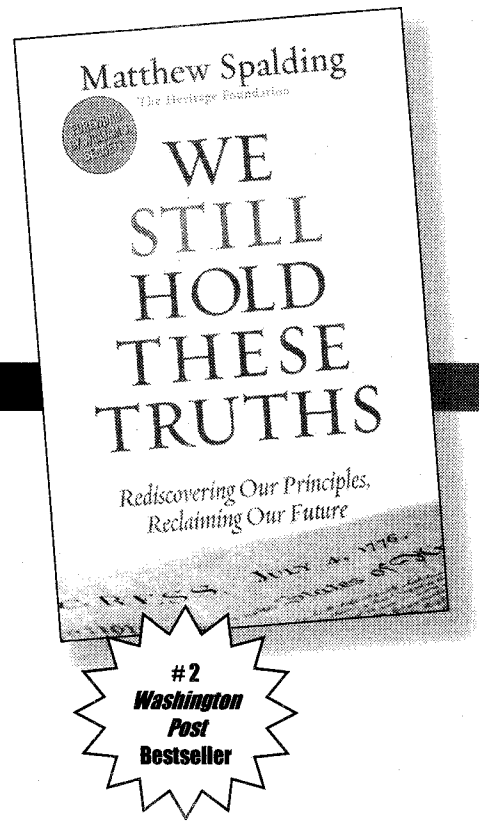
to make decisions for himself or herself without the guidance or 'help' of experts and professionals." We've delegated responsibility for our "core institutions"—public schools and colleges, health care, finance, retirement, government at all levels—to those experts, and all of them "cost more than we can pay," but "don't do what we need."

At the same time, the things that the governing structures now perform badly are things that really do need to be done, and done well. Conservatives have to finish the sentence, to explain how shrewdly delimited government can succeed where sloppy, undisciplined government has failed. Conservatives could offer "innovative leadership" with the help of a "new cohort of smart policy wonks with a practical vision for the future," according to Mead. The political problem is that the Tea Party populists may not accede to a conservative agenda set by a different set of experts and professionals. Populists "want big and simple ideas," Mead writes, not "intricate, finely crafted reforms whose beauty can only be appreciated by a few." If there's hope for a conservative coalition that overcomes those tensions, it resides in the constant awareness of a much bigger governmental and even civilizational threat—that the "dysfunction of the current system" will drive us "into a massive social and financial crisis."

The Tea Party mission can be described in another way. What's at stake in the war conservatives have declared on Obamacare is not only 18% of our economy, but 100% of our polity. If the anger over what the Democrats enacted, and the way they passed it, is replaced by acquiescence, America will have taken a big step toward having not only policies but political processes that are indistinguishable from Europe's. If the people who brought you Obamacare are not rebuked in the elections of 2010 and 2012, they, emboldened, will pursue further social transformations, regardless of popular opposition. Our ruling elites will eagerly adopt their European counterparts' posture toward the people: *You are wrong. We know better. We will do this, and you will like it.* To permit Obamacare to stand is to permit such an assertion to go unchallenged, and guarantee that it will become routine. By their passivity, the people will be complicit in their own disempowerment. As Frederick Douglass said in 1857, "Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them."

William Voegeli is contributing editor of the Claremont Review of Books *and author of* Never Enough: America's Limitless Welfare State *(Encounter Books).*

The Future of Liberty Depends on Renewing America's Principles



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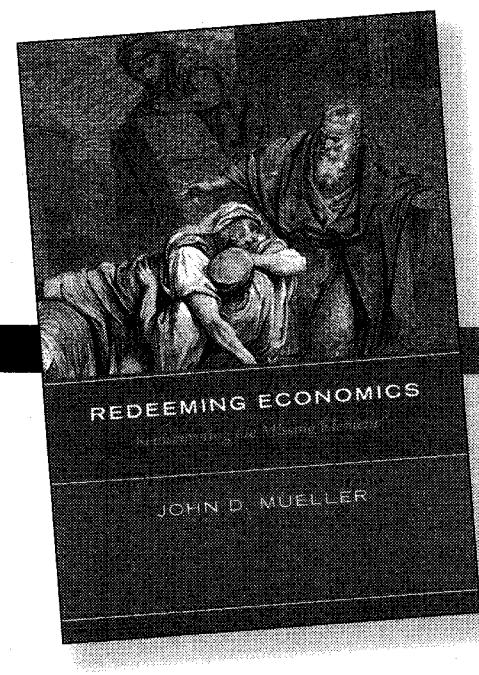

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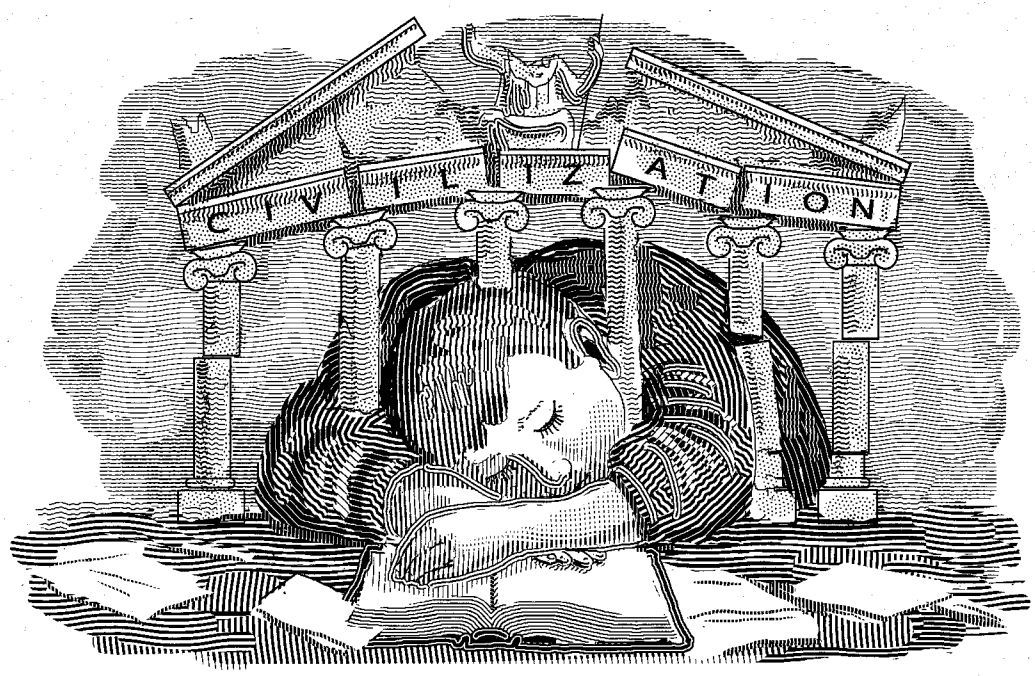
Book Review by Terrence O. Moore

The Making of an Educational Conservative

The Making of Americans: Democracy and Our Schools, by E.D. Hirsch.
Yale University Press, 288 pages, $25



E.D. HIRSCH HAS ARGUABLY DONE MORE FOR public school reform in this nation than any living American. Since his best-selling *Cultural Literacy* shared headlines with Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in the late 1980s, the University of Virginia professor of literature has persistently called attention to the things American children do not know and has explained in great detail the theory and practice behind *why* they do not know them. The short answer is that the nation's children—who turn into the nation's culturally illiterate adults—do not possess concrete knowledge because today's self-proclaimed "educators" do not teach it.

For 60 years or more public school teachers have avoided instruction in what they refer to dismissively as "mere facts," training students instead in supposedly more useful "skills." As a professor of education once told me, "It's not so important that children know things as that they know *how* to know things." Predictably, students graduate from public schools without either skills or knowledge since, as Hirsch has explained in dozens of ways, skills are dependent on knowledge. A person who is unfamiliar with the basic outline of Western history or the principal works of literature will, when reading a fairly complex text involving rich metaphors and subtle references, simply be unable to grasp the author's meaning. Any college professor who has let freshmen read a *Federalist* paper on their own knows that these high-school graduates might as well be reading Sanskrit.

Never content with merely exposing the dangerously low levels of Americans' reservoir of knowledge, Hirsch has worked tirelessly to get actual facts—whether stories, historical events, common metaphors, or rudiments of grammar—into young people's heads, beginning with his list of "What Literate Americans Know" (with entries from "1066" to "Zurich") at the back of *Cultural Literacy*. Since then, he has published dictionaries of cultural literacy, the popular *What Your X-Grader Needs to Know* series, and, through his non-profit Core Knowledge Foundation, created an exemplary curriculum for grades K-8, supplemented with excellent materials such as adaptations of the more difficult works of literature taught in the early grades.

Hirsch's most frustrating experience has been his warm reception among conservatives, including home-schoolers and certain charter-school founders, combined with the outright hostility directed at him by liberals and the education establishment. Hirsch is a man of the Left, the Old Left, as he points out in his new book, *The Making of Americans*. His deepest concern and sympathies are with disadvantaged children, mostly inner-city minorities who lack the (modicum of) knowledge and standard English normally acquired in suburban homes. Cultural literacy, or core knowledge, could help such children gain access to better jobs and full participation in the society instead of being marginalized by an obvious lack of preparation. Though clearly following in the tradition of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, to say nothing of Abraham Lincoln, in today's topsy-turvy political landscape, such notions are branded as right-wing, elitist, jingoist, and racist.

IT IS ALTOGETHER FITTING, THEN, THAT IN HIS latest book Hirsch has become overtly political. Beyond linking acquired knowledge to viability in the work place, as he has done in previous books, he attempts to reclaim public schooling as a fundamental part of the political project embarked upon by the founders and continued by Lincoln. To this end, he quotes approvingly from Lincoln's Lyceum speech: "Let reverence for the laws...become the political religion of the nation." This reverence for the laws should be forged in schools, argues Hirsch, the common public sphere shared by all Americans. Americans are not simply born; they must be made.

Hirsch does not shy away, then, from patriotism in his book, but thinks that it has been the

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monopoly of the Right for too long. "The proper aim of American schools is not jingoism but loyalty to a truly glorious ideal." Because America "has a content" (a by-word of educationese), any useful debate in education must involve the C-word: curriculum. Hirsch's frequent criticism of the Right's school-reform agenda, which he renews in this book, is that a complacent faith in free markets—i.e., opening up public schools to choice, whether in the form of vouchers or charter schools—won't automatically turn the tide of school decline. Conservatives would do well to see what curricula charter schools adopt before endorsing them. Certainly President Obama's cozying up to charters in urban neighborhoods should give us pause. Has he seen the free-market light in one area of policy, or might the former community organizer realize the potential in schools that could teach, say, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* better than they currently are doing? What curriculum would we expect of an Obama Leadership Academy?

Among the several other reforms presented in *The Making of Americans*, the most noteworthy is Hirsch's re-labeling "Progressive education" the "anti-curriculum movement." So-called Progressive educators have been united not so much by a common agenda as by their hostility to any form of traditional subject matter and learning method. If only the new name would stick! Hirsch also attempts to fend off the criticisms of the multicultural Left, which claims that traditional content oppresses or marginalizes minorities. Every hyphenated-American group is entitled to enjoy its own rich culture in private, writes Hirsch, but the common school should concentrate on those things Americans hold *in common*. What's more, he insists that education must remain anchored in tradition, a point that has not always been clear in his thought, since "cultural literacy" could be imagined to shift considerably over time. As he explains,

> I am a political liberal, but once I recognized the relative inertness and stability of the shared background knowledge students need to master reading and writing, I was forced to become an educational conservative.... Logic compelled the conclusion that achieving the democratic goal of high universal literacy would require schools to practice a large measure of educational traditionalism.

Yet even Hirsch's latest and most rooted manifesto is not without its flaws. He continues to overestimate what kids in the suburbs actually know, which, as far as I can tell, is not much. He doesn't stress phonics enough, because he thinks that to do so would diminish his primary thesis that background knowledge is the key to reading. He encourages reading stories and myths in order to add content to our minds but misses the way they ought to ennoble our souls. The conservative school-reform movement in this country is part of a wider effort at moral reform. The majority of home-schooling parents as well as those who send their children to start-up Christian schools or charter schools with traditional curricula are boycotting the public schools as much for moral as for intellectual reasons.

Consequently, Hirsch holds out too much hope of converting the Left while not welcoming his natural supporters on the Right. He underestimates the education establishment's fear and hostility towards knowledge and rigor, presenting the past "sixty years without a curriculum" as a well-meaning and forgivable misunderstanding. But Progressive education must be understood as an anti-teaching movement as much as an anti-curriculum movement. Anyone who suggests American education should be different from what it is now is subject to merciless attack by those who claim they would teach children even if they didn't get paid, while their unions push one demand: higher salaries for less work.

Despite his admirable inquiry into the political importance of education, Hirsch fails to see that the ruin of education is part of a larger plan. Progressive theorists did not just stumble into some bad pedagogy in the early 20th century. In order to replace constitutional government with unchecked bureaucracy, the Progressives had to attack the knowledge, reason, and habits of mind at the heart of the founders' education, ideas about the nature of man and his civic happiness that once were commonplace among American citizens.

But for conservatives to dwell on the shortcomings of *The Making of Americans* and Hirsch's larger curriculum project rather than praising their virtues would be like one man complaining about how another holds his hammer while the edifice is crumbling underneath both of them. For more than two decades this political liberal and educational conservative has been among the very few professors eloquently calling for a solid curriculum in order to rebuild public education. If one tenth of this nation's professors gave one tenth the attention to the issue that E.D. Hirsch has, the schools would be fixed by now. Until then, we continue to build higher education on a foundation of sand.

Terrence O. Moore is a professor of history at Hillsdale College, and former principal of Ridgeview Classical Schools in Fort Collins, CO, one of the leading public charter schools in the nation.

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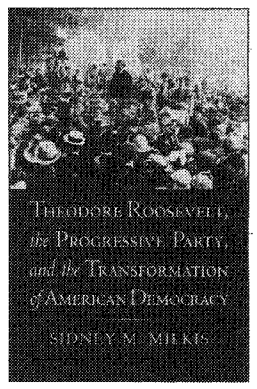

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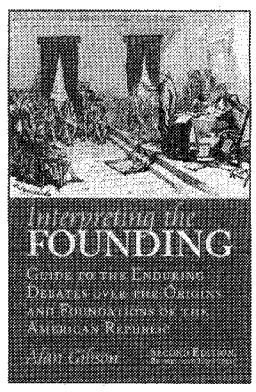

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Book Review by Christopher Flannery

The Common Sense of the Subject

We Still Hold These Truths: Rediscovering Our Principles, Reclaiming Our Future,
by Matthew Spalding. ISI Books, 288 pages, $26.95

Reflecting near the end of his life on the political principles famously proclaimed half a century earlier in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that these principles were not new or "never before thought of"; they were "the common sense of the subject," an "expression of the American Mind." Weaving together elements of ancient and modern political thought, different strands of Christianity, British political tradition, their own extensive colonial experience, and a judgment of their circumstances, Americans had by 1776 become ready to appeal to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" to justify establishing an independent republic based on what Lincoln would later call "the definitions and axioms of free society."

In *We Still Hold These Truths: Rediscovering Our Principles, Reclaiming Our Future,* Matthew Spalding argues that over the course of the last century America has changed—not to say lost—its mind. Swept away by the Progressives' assault upon America's founding principles, we have largely abandoned them and by doing this have brought upon ourselves a historic political crisis. Spalding, who is the director of the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at the Heritage Foundation (and—full disclosure here—a fellow of the Claremont Institute), is no starry-eyed optimist. *We* Do Not *Still Hold These Truths* could also be a fitting title for his book. But those who need at least a thread of hope in these hard times will be assured by one quiet passage that "progressive ideas have not completely won the day." Nonetheless, America is "on a course of self-destruction," and it will take a "monumental effort" to avert the crisis and return the country to its founding common sense. This book is a worthy contribution to that effort.

The Progressive movement is the source of contemporary American liberalism. Its philosophical repudiation of the American Founding began over a century ago—in the forgotten and remembered writings of Woodrow Wilson, J. Allen Smith, Arthur F. Bentley, Herbert Croly, Charles Beard, John Dewey, and others. As with any such movement—as with the American Founding itself—the Progressive movement is complicated and consists of various tendencies not all of which agree with one another. But Spalding, in the chapter he devotes to the subject, emphasizes two related ideas, seemingly far removed from the hurly-burly of politics, that are at the heart of Progressivism: there is no such thing as unchanging truth, and all ideas are historical. For the Progressives, there is no abiding non-arbitrary standard of moral or political judgment, like the founders' natural law or natural right, that is independent of human will. Government must evolve to meet evolving needs and must be guided by evolving standards of right. It is therefore impossible, as progressive political scientist Charles Merriam put it in 1920, "that any limit can be set to governmental activity." The widespread intellectual rejection of the American Founding's natural-right principles became the ground for the political transformations effected by Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson, not to mention, as Spalding doesn't, the more recent forays of Barack Obama.

The upshot is an increasingly centralized and bureaucratized administrative state that expands relentlessly while making an ever-growing percentage of the citizen-body dependent on its ministrations. Clients of the state, as Spalding observes, are on the verge of becoming the majority faction James Madison feared as the greatest danger to free governments. Tocqueville's warnings about democratic despotism seem to Spalding more and more prophetic, as an all-intrusive state reduces the people (in Tocqueville's words) "to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd."

To turn the country from its self-destructive course will require a restoration no less profound and complete than the Progressive transformation has been—in education, politics, civic culture, law, jurisprudence, government practices, and domestic and foreign policy—and Spalding considers in his concluding chapter some of the very difficult steps that such a restoration might entail. But underlying all of them, he argues, must be the restoration of the natural-right common sense of the American Founding as "the central idea of our nation's public philosophy." So far have we traveled down the Progressive highway that even this will not be possible until we "rediscover" the founders' principles "as a people."

It is to help bring about this rediscovery that Spalding writes his book, which aims to "explain and bring to life ten core principles that define our national creed and common purpose." These core principles, in the order in which they are discussed (roughly corresponding to the chapters of the book), are liberty, equality, natural rights, consent of the governed, religious freedom, private property, the rule of law, constitutionalism, self-government, and independence.

"Only when we *know* these principles once again," Spalding writes, "can we renew America." So this book is a preliminary step on the road to reclaiming our future. It is written for the intelligent citizen. It is an invitation to join the statesmen of the American Founding in "thinking through the first principles of liberty and constitutional government." It is an example of what Spalding, paraphrasing his teacher Harry Jaffa, calls a "scholarship of freedom," which would offer a "forthright defense of America's principles in the public square."

Spalding's book calls our attention not just to the principles but to the politics—the statesmanship or practical wisdom—of the American Founding. Each chapter instructs us in invigorating ways about the political judgment that our own generation of Americans must exercise to bring America's core principles to bear in our distinctive circumstances.

The epigraph of the book is a brief quotation from Ronald Reagan. Its first sentence reads: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." At the beginning and the end of the book, Spalding asks: "Do we still hold these truths?" In every generation since 1776, it seems to me, as it seems to Spalding, that whatever America has done (in Alexander Hamilton's lovely and inspiriting phrase) "to vindicate the honour of the human race," we have done because we have been able, in principle and in practice, to answer in the affirmative. We may hope that the next generation will rise again to that answer, aided by Matthew Spalding's excellent primer in American common sense.

Christopher Flannery is senior editor of the Claremont Review of Books.

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Essay by Wilfred M. McClay

The Sources of American Renewal

These past few years have been a rough and discouraging stretch for Americans in general, and perhaps especially for American conservatives. Yet in such times all of us should recall the counsel of Shakespeare, expressed by the exiled and deposed Duke Senior in *As You Like It*:

> Sweet are the uses of adversity,
> Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
> (Act 2, Scene 1)

There is, in other words, something to be said for the sheer gravity of the challenges we now face as a nation, challenges that we can no longer evade or postpone. Their weightiness may even turn out to be a providential gift, albeit one shrouded in deep and unattractive disguise.

Arnold Toynbee saw the dynamic of challenge-and-response as the chief source of a civilization's greatness. Far from being the fruit of a steady inner-directed maturation, a civilization's higher development arose out of its skill and stamina in overcoming a succession of ordeals. "Creation," he asserted, "is the outcome of an encounter," and "genesis is a product of interaction." Great civilizations die from suicide rather than murder, which is to say that they die when they no longer possess the will to respond confidently and creatively to the very challenges that would otherwise make them stronger and better.

He was right. Challenge and response is the way of life, and the way of national renewal. The challenges facing us are so great now, as we look at our massive and unsustainable deficits, our faltering economy, our fragile families and fraying moral fabric, and our diminishing place in the world, that we have no choice but to respond to them. The gravity of the situation forces us to think our way back to our first principles. This is not quite what President Obama's Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel had in mind in his now famous words—probably the chief ones for which history will remember him—that "you never want a serious crisis to go to waste." But we would be doing just that, wasting the crisis by failing to learn from it, were we to respond with acts of mere band-aid pragmatism and temporizing.

Some think the way to respond is to ramp up the comprehensive supervisory power of our cultural elites, and of the political class that embodies and serves them, over our society and economy. This is the view of the Obama Administration, with its centralized and technocratic vision of social reform, and its stress on the uses of expert knowledge in the proper governance of human affairs—ideas that are far from new, but rather are throwbacks to the central contention of the Progressive movement a hundred years ago, and a clear gesture in the direction of the vast, all-embracing, and severely strained welfare states of northwestern Europe. It is also the view of those like *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, who has warmly embraced the Obama Administration, praised its "pragmatism" and reliance upon "professional expertise," and admonished conservatives for choosing to "stick with Reagan" in perpetuating an "insane" antagonism to a large, powerful national government.

Reagan's Example

But there is another approach to these problems, and it is precisely the approach that Ronald Reagan promoted throughout most of his career, an approach that emphasized personal liberty, economic growth, individual enterprise, decentralization, traditional values, personal responsibility, religious faith, and reliance upon the organs of civil society.

In particular, the ascendancy of Reagan represented something enduringly important and distinctive about American life: its remarkable openness to infusions of new energy and cre-

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ativity from below, i.e., from the non-accredited, non-credentialed, and unheralded non-elite sectors of its society. That these avenues of fresh energy and creativity be kept open is of crucial importance, particularly when so much of the parlous state of American life, and particularly American culture, in the past half-century or so has come from the manifold failures of our accredited elites, our best and brightest, which have sought to transform American life beyond recognition, and had not-inconsiderable success in the undertaking.

This is not, strictly speaking, a populist argument. Elites we shall always have with us, and it is an illusion to imagine that "the people" can ever rule in any unmediated way. But there are better or worse elites, with better or worse lines of communication with those they govern, and there is always a tendency for elites to become inbred, brittle, and enervated, and therefore unworthy to govern. This is one of the challenges to which they must either respond or succumb. One of the greatest strengths of American social life has been its ability, again and again, to incorporate and assimilate the waves of contributions of new energies and new blood to the elite class. The steady opening up of our elite institutions in recent years to more meritocratic criteria of admission, even if imperfectly achieved and marred by various forms of preferential treatment, would seem to testify to that strength.

Meritocracy or Monoculture?

Yet there is some reason to doubt whether the intellectual meritocracy, the interlocking directorate of elite institutions that has evolved over the past 50 years, is really doing that job effectively anymore, if it ever did. Instead, it seems to be fostering an intellectual monoculture that is ripe and smug and heavy with a sense of entitlement. It is no coincidence that Barack Obama is, of all the presidents in American history, most fully the product of elite academia, from his elite Hawaiian prep school to his Columbia and Harvard degrees, and his years on the faculty of the University of Chicago Law School. His smooth baritone voice is the quintessential tone of certified, accredited intelligence, the American equivalent of what in Great Britain would be called Received Pronunciation, that gold-plated Oxonian intonation that used to be the standard of the BBC. It hardly matters what he says with such a voice, and indeed, a reading of his transcripts shows that he is generally not saying very much. He has no other bank of experience than elite academe to draw upon, aside from tactical lessons drawn from the school of Chicago politics.

We have for decades now had a growing problem of fundamental loyalties in our current elite academic culture. It is entirely fitting that there should be some distance between the two, and that academia be preserved as an island of free reflection, where even the most basic premises can be questioned freely, within the bounds of rationality and civility. But that is something very different from the pervasive atmosphere of our present academic institutions, which seem reflexively to teach disdain of fundamental American principles, and have for a generation or more inculcated in its charges a lack of confidence in the American project in the world. Even students who have never read a word of the late Howard Zinn can repeat his slanders verbatim, because they take them in with the air they breathe. Students know that such assertions are always the "safe" response in an academic setting, hence they offer them up automatically, mindlessly.

Elite academia has given us a president who presumes to apologize to the world for his country, while a political class in Washington has put us on a path to swift and certain bankruptcy.

But we also have a different, if not completely unrelated problem, which is the rise of an identifiable "political class," of those, now including the leadership of powerful public-employee unions which also enjoy the protections of civil-service laws, whose interests are quite distinct from the interests of those they are supposed to serve, and who live parasitically off the productive economy. The inability of either political party to come to terms with this growing problem—and indeed, the Democratic Party's astonishingly flagrant indifference to it—now suggests to a growing number of Americans that "the political class," those who make their living off the political system, is so insulated from rebuke that even the prospect of electoral defeat will change very little in their behavior. Elite academia has given us a president who presumes to apologize to the world for his country, while a political class entrenched in Washington and Sacramento and Albany has put us on a path to swift and certain bankruptcy.

American Renewal

It should encourage us somewhat, though, to realize that we have been here before. These kinds of concerns were precisely what Ronald Reagan's rise was about. Reagan offered a healthy affirmation of the core of American life, an affirmation coming from a man who was uncredentialed in any of the usual senses. Those of us old enough to remember will recall that he paid for this affirmative spirit by being constantly adjudged a hot-headed cretin, not least by the leadership of the Republican Party in the 1970s. What a joke he seemed to be: a man of obscure Midwestern origins, graduate of a no-name college, who parlayed his odd jobs as lifeguard and radio announcer into a minor acting career and then into lucrative flackery for General Electric and a stint in California politics. Who was such a man to presume to reform American politics?

Now that he is so widely and generally venerated, it is easy to forget—but important to remember—how savagely and dismissively he was treated from beginning to end. This is especially relevant when one contemplates both the sources of, and the reaction to, the Tea Party movement, an expression of popular outrage specifically directed at the political class and the experts whom they employ. This is an example of energy emerging from below, of the vitality of the uncredentialed again asserting itself—even if at times such energy may assert itself crudely, in the manner of an unguided missile. And the very name—Tea Party—represents an effort to claim for such energy the mantle of a great and historic American precedent, the American Revolution itself.

The claim is justified, and worth contemplating. For the renewal of American life is not going to be administered from the top down, by administrative or legislative fiat. That is not the nation's history, nor is it firmly grounded in our national myths and lore. Instead, our history indicates that much of the energy must come from the bottom up. One can think, for example, of the enduringly vital role of immigration in American life, and specifically of the ways in which America's steady flow of legal immigrants has always served to renew a sense of the national calling, and reaffirm America's promise, precisely because the life-changing experiences of immigrants gave them a more vivid sense of that promise than those of many native-born. Emma Lazarus's famous poem engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty did not entreat the world to "give us your well-credentialed"; quite the contrary.

Or consider the profound symbolic meaning for Americans of the term "frontier." For much of the world, a frontier is simply a border, and the word accordingly has a somewhat forbidding as-

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pect. You don't go there, not unless you have to. But for Americans a frontier is a place you *do* go. It is a verge between nature and culture, where the unsettled has not yet been disciplined into the settled, and where scope for the most fundamental human striving is still open and widely available. It is the point of creative contact with the energies of nature, a contact thought to be uniquely powerful and renewing. It is a matrix of challenge and response. Small wonder that the historian Frederick Jackson Turner believed, even if wrongly, that the existence of a frontier "explained" American development. Small wonder that Turner's "thesis" has lived on, despite its many detractors and persuasive refutations by careful historians, since it still expresses something profound and living in the national ethos.

Lincoln the Frontiersman

It is, I would argue, the same element in the national ethos that informs a considerable part of our veneration of Abraham Lincoln. In fact, as historian Merrill Peterson has shown in his fascinating book *Lincoln in American Memory* (1994), there have been many Lincolns over the years, some of them virtually archetypes—Lincoln as the Savior of the Union, the Great Emancipator, the Man of the People, the Self-Made Man, and so on. But looming large among these archetypal visions of Lincoln is that of Lincoln as a frontiersman, a common man who was born in a log cabin to humble circumstances, a man whose character and outlook were molded, not by the advantages of birth or pedigree, but by his own immense striving toward self-betterment, and his labor to wring a better life out of the hard opportunities presented to him.

Not everything about this was good, and Lincoln especially regretted the absence of educational opportunities in his own life. But one cannot separate the resourcefulness of his character from the fact of his frontier origins. Nor can one separate those humble origins from his iconic and enduring meaning in American life. There was nothing ordinary about Lincoln. But his ascension to the presidency was a clear example of the common man's potential. As Lincoln said in announcing his candidacy for the Illinois General Assembly in 1832, he "was born, and [had] ever remained, in the most humble walks of life," without "wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend" him. But he had been given unprecedented opportunity to realize his potential by the right set of conditions.

By the way, this son of a more pioneering America was also the only American president to hold a patent. It stemmed from his time spent on riverboats, transporting farm produce and other cargo down the Mississippi River. Lincoln had seen boats run aground on sandbars or in shoal waters, and the experience gave him the idea of "buoyant air chambers" made of "waterproof fabric" which could be inflated and deflated as needed to help keep a boat afloat.

He obtained a patent for this invention, "Buoying Vessels Over Shoals," in 1849. A decade later, on the lecture circuit, he described the first English patent laws as one of the three greatest "inventions and discoveries" in history (along with the written and printed word and the discovery of America), for their addition of "the fuel of *interest* to the *fire* of genius in the discovery and production of new and useful things."

This is a nice illustration not only of Lincoln's resourceful mind, but of the importance that he placed upon innovation, and the realistic view he took of human nature—that innovators would be more likely to innovate if the legal structure allowed them to profit from their innovation.

So the frontier experience of Lincoln's day by its very nature placed less importance upon pedigree. Yes, it was not universal in character. Specifically, it favored those who were white and male. It was not entirely free. But we can say that the frontier tended that way, in the direction of a rough and ready equality of opportunity.

This was for Lincoln a kind of fulfillment of the spirit of the Declaration of Independence—which he revered and repeatedly recurred to—in its affirmation of the equal worth of all men, and their equal entitlement to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And the equal right of all men to the fruits of their own labors, a declaration grounded not in the will of governments or men, but in the dictates of Nature and Nature's God. Lincoln loathed slavery from his earliest youth—something he shared with his Baptist parents—but his deepest complaint about slavery seemed to be that it was a form of theft, which allowed one class of men to steal from another class the fruit of the latter's labors. The notion of distributive justice was less important to him than the notion of limitless human opportunity—a priority that was much more in keeping with the ethos of the frontier.

An Enduring Appeal

The exalted idea of the frontier in American society goes far beyond the sort of flat-footed material explanations that Turner thought he had provided. It is something closer to an organizing myth, with deep roots in the entire history of European civilization. The idea of the frontier in a sense extended back to the very beginnings of European contact with and settlement of the Western hemisphere, and to the idea of the West itself—as a place of renewal, of beginning again, and of America's naturalness *contra* Europe—which substituted the virtues of nature for the pedigrees of culture and history.

Hence, one sees a growing concern in 19th-century America, as the continent began to be settled and the frontier subdued, about the loss of this connection with nature and the possible effects. One sees it in forms of expression as different as the Hudson River School of romantic landscape painters, or the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau—or, by the beginning of the 20th century, Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian* (1902), which, like all the genre fiction revolving around the Old West, seemed to celebrate the manly energy of "frontier justice," and speak to the perils of "overcivilization," a theme also stressed by Wister's friend Theodore Roosevelt, whose own Western sojourn was so central to his experience.

Turner's frontier thesis, put forward in 1893, stated simply: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." Yet Turner ended his analysis with barely disguised anxiety. According to the 1890 census, the frontier was closed, which meant that an era of American history was closing as well. What would come next? Who could know? Might the loss of the actual frontier also mean the loss of something essential to American life? Would we cease to dream of frontiers and cease to seek them?

If that has happened, one would certainly not know it from our public rhetoric in subsequent years. John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign for the presidency dubbed itself the New Frontier, a direct tip of the hat to Turner's thesis, and an effort to reclaim and recover the strength of the idea of the frontier, applying it to the exploration of space, among other things. Or one might consider the rhetoric accompanying the incorporation of Alaska into the Union as the 49th state in 1959, the year before. The enduring appeal of Alaska to those who go there, the symbolic meaning of Alaska in American life, was well captured by one of the state's most enduring names, which one sees even today on every Alaskan license plate: The Last Frontier.

The Danger of Overorganization

What these examples suggest is a persistent sense that there is a danger of overorganization in American life, of an over-emphasis upon credentialism and specialization, forces that taken in excess can cripple our sense of human possibility, and along with it the health of our communities, and our liberty. President Obama wants everyone to go to college, and he sees this, not unjustifiably,

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as the federal government's lending a generous helping hand of opportunity. But perhaps it is less generous than it seems. Perhaps we already have too much schooling in our culture, too much hegemony of the schooled, too much licensing, too much regulation of experience, too little space to move around and find our own way, to experiment and make mistakes, to exercise the power of personal initiative without the supervision of experts, nannies, busybodies, and others who should spend more time minding their own business.

Perhaps we have become too concerned with pedigree, with the right schools, the right career path, and so on. What does it tell us today, if the greatest politician in our history, our greatest orator, a man whose command of the English language and of the principles of constitutional democracy was without peer, was a largely unschooled and self-educated man without any social advantages? But he was a man who came of age with one inestimable advantage: he lived in the loose-jointed environment of antebellum America, an arena remarkably well-calibrated to the development of his talents.

Indeed, there was a time well within the memory of many living Americans when one's advancement in life was not so heavily determined by the credential of where, or even whether, one attended college. To be sure, one didn't easily make the leap from Eastern Illinois State Teachers College to a white-shoe Park Avenue law firm. But other things were very different. Politics, for example. One of the greatest of America's 20th-century presidents—and one of the most literate and historically informed since the time of the founders—was Harry S. Truman, who did not have a college education at all, but instead began working for the Santa Fe Railroad when he graduated from high school.

That less organized America had many faults, and I do not want to romanticize away those faults. But in fact the worst of its faults was its failure to extend the opportunities that a Truman enjoyed to all Americans. That is a fault that only serves to confirm the worthiness of the ideal itself. For all its imperfections, a more loose-jointed America is more open to sheer human possibility than the putatively meritocratic iron cage of standardized tests and glib interpersonal skills that we are now so proud of having constructed, and imagine to be less elitist than the world it replaced.

Open to All

We need to restore and preserve a less regimented, less status-stratified, less school-sorted, more open-ended America. We need an economy and legal structures that are as open as possible to enterprise and innovation. An educational system that is open to all, and geared not to the manufacturing of credentials (or artificial and dysfunctional rites of passage) but to the empowering of individuals. A society that concerns itself with the knowledge and skills a person can acquire, not where or how he acquired them.

I mentioned Alaska. Consider for a moment the national reception of John McCain's vice-presidential pick, that state's then-governor, Sarah Palin—a working-class woman with a scrappy education, many different jobs, no clear career track, and a working-class husband—a woman who was, like so many women of the American West, both untraditional and profoundly traditional at the same time, a combination that makes no sense in the settled East but makes perfect sense in the context of frontier societies. Reasonable people can differ widely in their estimation of the cogency of Palin's political views or campaign style, or whether she was, or is, adequately prepared for high office. Those are legitimate points of debate. But it was strange and deeply disconcerting to see her mocked and pilloried for the unpedigreed aspects of her own social background, notably the obscurity of the colleges she attended. There was, and is, something profoundly unseemly about it, particularly when it emanates from some of the most powerful and privileged in our land.

For all its imperfections, a more loose-jointed America is more open to sheer human possibility than the putatively meritocratic iron cage of standardized tests.

This ought to have been infuriating to many Americans. For with her checkered and educationally modest background she represented Abraham Lincoln's America, and Reagan's America, much more than did either her running mate, a Naval Academy graduate and son and grandson of admirals, or the two Ivy-credentialed Democratic presidential candidates, or the three presidents before the present one: Bush, Clinton, Bush, all having Yale or Harvard pedigrees. When David Brooks, writing in November 2008 about the glittering credentials and "superb personnel decisions" of the new Obama Administration, joked about the possibility that a foreign enemy might find America especially vulnerable if it were to strike during a Harvard-Yale football game, he was pointing in an approving way toward a development that is not at all healthy.

We should think once more of Lincoln, and of his great speech at the dedication of the cemetery in Gettysburg. As everyone knows, there were two notable speeches that day. The first—and the longest and most learned—was given by the supremely well-pedigreed Edward Everett, former president of Harvard and the first American to receive a German Ph.D. But it was the self-educated frontiersman president who gave the speech whose words ring down through the ages.

Hence, when we celebrated in 2009 the 50th anniversary of Alaskan statehood and the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, we were, in a sense, celebrating the same thing: the enduring frontier spirit in America, which far from being deplored, ought to be celebrated and nurtured. In doing so, we will be celebrating the ability of this country to give unprecedented scope to the amazing and unpredictable depths of the human person, depths that cannot be produced factory-like by the right schools or the right social arrangements, but emerge from the unpredictable and often surprising potential in the minds and hearts and spirits of ordinary people when they are left free to pursue their ambitions. The examples of Lincoln and Alaska exemplify qualities of character and spirit that are at the heart of what this country is at its best, and that we should want to foster and preserve in the years ahead. This is a sentiment that Ronald Reagan would surely have endorsed, for it was one that he embodied and fought for his whole life. It is one worth sticking with.

Wilfred M. McClay is the SunTrust Bank Chair of Excellence in Humanities and a professor of history at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga.

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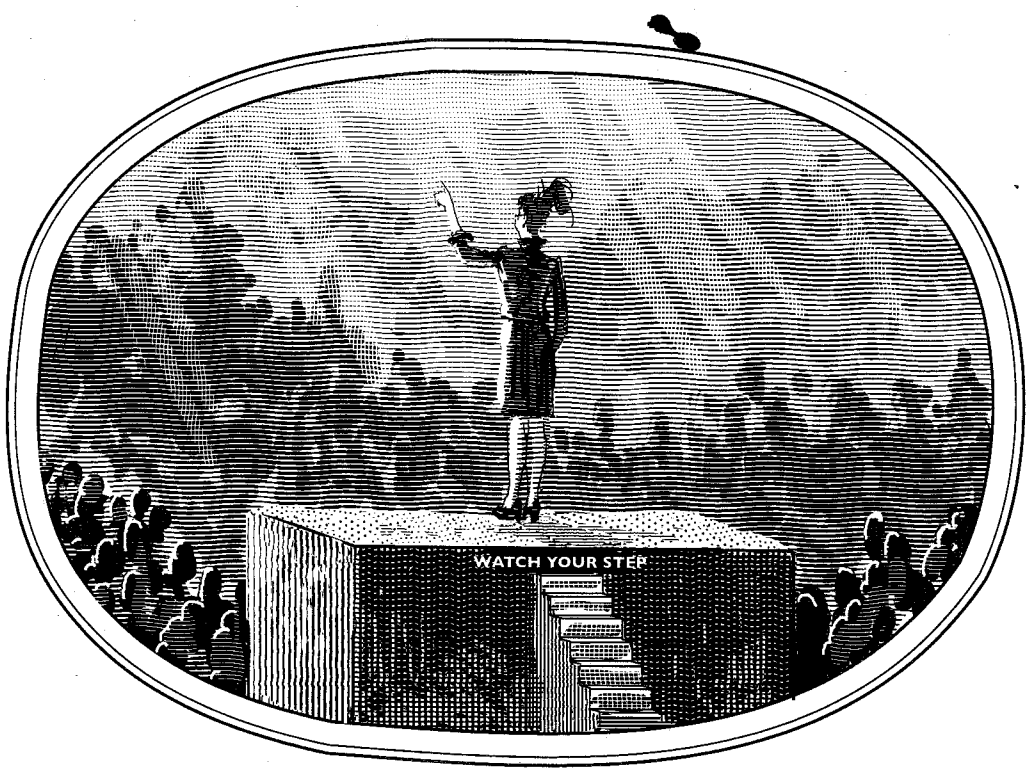
Book Review by John J. Pitney, Jr.

American Woman

Going Rogue: An American Life, by Sarah Palin.
HarperCollins, 432 pages,$28.99



Books by politicians are an odd genre. Sometimes they reach the bestseller lists, but practically nobody *reads* them. For many people, the mere act of getting such a book is a political statement, like donning a campaign button. Buyers take satisfaction in knowing that a bit of the purchase price goes to a good cause (i.e., the author) and that displaying the book on the living-room shelf will tell visitors which side the household is on. Opening the thing is optional.

In the case of would-be presidents, such books tend to focus on two themes, in varying proportions: "My life (and how it made me so wonderful and humble)" and "My vision for America, with a twelve-point plan to curb the deficit (specific budget cuts not included)." Such works are usually ghost-written slabs of mindlessness, so buyers have good cause to leave them unread. The only people with a rational motive to turn every page are opposition researchers. If they're lucky, they will find nuggets that once seemed harmless but have since turned toxic. ("Here's a picture of me with my pals Rod Blagojevich, David Paterson, and John Edwards.")

In certain ways, Sarah Palin's book is typical. A ghostwriter, Lynn Vincent, did the actual labor of getting the words on paper. It's mostly a "my life" work, with a "vision" chapter at the end. That chapter, the weakest part of the book, is a barrage of clichés. "The nation is at a crossroads," she says. In an echo of President Obama, she adds: "Like every other ordinary American, I'm tired of the divisions and the special interests that pit us against one another."

Yet in spite of all the pap and platitudes, *Going Rogue* is worth a look. Sarah Palin is different from other people who have run for president or vice president, as the description of her first child's birth makes clear. Instead of the peaceful Earth Mother experience that she had imagined, she writes, she vainly tried to do breathing techniques "when what I really wanted to do was scream bloody murder and beg for drugs. Blessed Mother of Jesus, I finally got them!" One does not find similar passages in George W. Bush's campaign autobiography.

More seriously, *Going Rogue* shows how her fifth child sets her apart from most other American politicians. In 2008, she gave birth to a boy with Down Syndrome. To anyone who has ever learned that a son or daughter is handicapped, her account is both familiar and moving. She got the first alarm during her pregnancy when a sonogram showed that the baby's neck was thicker than normal. She knew that such a feature was a sign of Down but then went into denial, thinking "*God won't give me a special needs child.*" But He did. When amniocentesis confirmed the suspicion, she frantically tried to think of alternative explanations, such as a false positive or a paperwork mix-up. When she realized that there was no mistake, she recalled that such a diagnosis leads to abortion 90% of the time. That thought was "not a consideration so much as a sudden understanding of why people would grasp at a quick 'solution,' a way to make the 'problem' just go away. But again, I had to hold on to that seed of faith."

Many people in the public sphere preach about abortion, but very few have ever had to face the issue in their own lives. Sarah Palin has, and her decision to go through with the pregnancy confirms that her convictions are genuine. And yet, she evinces a sympathetic understanding of the pressures that could tempt people to take a different route.

Other recollections suggest a more complex Sarah Palin than one would know from watching Tina Fey's impression on *Saturday Night Live*. Despite her opposition to intrusive government, she acknowledges a government program that enabled her

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to become a high school basketball star. "I'm a product of Title IX and am proud that it was Alaska's own Senator Ted Stevens who helped usher through the federal legislation in 1972 to ensure girls would have the right to the same education and athletic opportunities as boys." She cites Jennifer Gavora's study of Title IX, *Tilting the Playing Field*, reviewed in the *CRB*'s Fall 2002 issue.

During the 2008 campaign, stories of her roundabout route to a college degree drew snickers from certain quarters. The book effectively swats down the criticism. "Yes, it did take me five years because I paid my own way," she says, explaining that she had to come home to work between semesters, and sometimes had to take time off before she could afford tuition again.

She recounts a vetting interview in which McCain campaign manager Steve Schmidt asked her about evolution. When she suggested that she believed in some form of intelligent design, "Schmidt winced and raised his eyebrows." Schmidt's reaction suggests that he did not know the state of public opinion. According to a 2008 Gallup survey, only 14% of Americans held the strict evolutionist position that God had no part in the ascent of man versus 80% who believed either that God guided the process (36%) or created humans directly in our current form (44%).

Palin is a strong supporter of traditional marriage, but she also believes in tolerance and the rule of law. When Alaska's supreme court ruled that the state had to offer health benefits to the same-sex partners of state employees, she explains, "As governor, I meant to follow the law.... It wasn't about me; it was—and is—about respecting the Constitution and the separation of powers."

Overall, her governorship got strong reviews from the political community and ordinary Alaskans. Still, John McCain stunned the media when he chose her as his running mate. The selection should not have been so shocking. A sitting Republican lawmaker was out, since McCain was trying to position himself as an outsider untainted by congressional scandals. Demographic balance was helpful, lest Democrats attack the GOP for putting up yet another pale-male ticket. And because the party base was cool toward him, he needed someone who could excite conservatives. Two governors best met the criteria of reformism, conservatism, and demographic balance: Palin, and Bobby Jindal of Louisiana. After Jindal took himself out of the running, she was the only one left.

The party's initial response was enthusiastic. Fiscal conservatives liked her record of cutting pork barrel projects. Second Amendment enthusiasts happily rallied behind a fellow NRA member. Social conservatives admired her for walking the pro-life walk. Republican women thought she was one of them. Republican men thought she was hot.

The reaction from the commentariat was different. Having neither an elite education nor years of experience in national politics, she was quite alien to them. And what they saw, they did not like. The big hair, the big family, the hunting rifle, the blue-collar husband, the more-than-nominal churchgoing—all these things screamed "Not one of us!" The assaults began at once. The most notorious was blogger Andrew Sullivan's crackpot theory that she faked her pregnancy in order to cover up an out-of-wedlock birth by her daughter Bristol.

Within days, the news broke that Bristol was five months pregnant. Although this revelation discredited the Sullivan theory (at least to those who knew basic biology and arithmetic), it was a chum bucket for the media predators. Palin remembers that she was brushing her teeth when she saw it on television: "I nearly gagged on my toothbrush. *Oh, God*, I thought. *Here we go.*" And there they went. Some liberal journalists eagerly speculated that conservatives would instantly turn their backs on her. But the GOP convention took place in 21st-century Minnesota, not 17th-century Massachusetts. Nobody was going to pin a scarlet letter on Palin just because her teenage daughter had hooked up with Mr. Wrong.

When reporters asked about Bristol, Barack Obama said that candidates' family lives were off limits and suggested he would oust anybody in his campaign who crossed that line. Three days later, a member of his finance committee told a national radio audience that Palin had put career above family. Obama kept him on board. After the election, Obama made him a trustee of his inauguration committee and later named him ambassador to Belgium.

The attacks on Palin's family made Republicans even more fervent in her defense. When she stepped onto the stage to accept the nomination, the crowd erupted in a long, loud, ecstatic yell. "I knew we'd have a great time that night," she recalls. And she did, even though her teleprompter jammed at one point and she had to give the speech from memory. Her smiling, confident delivery sent the audience into rapture and prompted Michael Reagan to say that the speech reminded him of his father. That's Republican canonization.

For a couple of weeks afterward, it looked as if a Palin effect might shake up the race. The "enthusiasm gap" dramatically narrowed, with GOP volunteers fired up to work for the lady from Alaska, along with the old guy at the top of the ticket. After lagging in head-to-head matchups, McCain actually led in some polls by as much as 10 points. But the lead did not last. With a shaky economy, a protracted war, and an unpopular incumbent, any party would have a very rough time holding on to the White House. In mid-September, the financial crisis abruptly ended any GOP dreams of a 2008 triumph.

Around the same time, bad interviews with Charlie Gibson and Katie Couric scarred Palin's public image. In *Going Rogue*, she argues convincingly that the McCain campaign did a poor job of preparing her and that CBS edited the Couric interview to make her look as foolish as possible. But in spite of the extenuating circumstances, she has to bear much of the blame. Any candidate for national office has a responsibility to master the issues, especially when he or she lacks traditional credentials. She is justified in saying, "I knew that I had let the team down."

Some analysts have blamed her for the party's defeat—a dubious proposition. Political science forecasting models pointed to a major Democratic victory, and these forecasts came in before the September political mudslides. Although the GOP probably would have lost with or without her, her image problems have damaged her long-term prospects. A February 2010 poll showed that 52% of Republicans thought her unqualified for the presidency. Unless she can drastically reduce that figure, her chances of winning the nomination are remote.

Will the book help? In describing her experiences as Alaska's governor, Palin talks about policy more than hostile critics have let on. She has some sensible things to say about energy, the environment, and the corporatist political culture that she inherited. But as I suggested at the start, very few people will actually read the book. To fix her basic problems, Sarah Palin has to show that she can take tough questions from the press. Yes, the reporters may be biased, and yes, they may throw her curveballs. But so what? If she can't handle *Meet the Press*, how is she going to handle Iran? It would be a shame if she shrank from the test.

John J. Pitney, Jr., is the Roy P. Crocker Professor of American Politics at Claremont McKenna College, and co-author, with Joseph M. Bessette, of American Government and Politics: Deliberation, Democracy, and Citizenship *(Cengage).*

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Book Review by Charles Murray

Who Is Ayn Rand?

Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right, by Jennifer Burns.
Oxford University Press, 384 pages, $27.95

Ayn Rand and the World She Made, by Anne C. Heller.
Nan A. Talese, 592 pages, $35

In 1991, the book-of-the-month club conducted a survey asking people what book had most influenced their lives. The Bible ranked number one and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* was number two. In 1998, the Modern Library released two lists of the top 100 books of the 20th century. One was compiled from the votes of the Modern Library's Board, consisting of luminaries such as Joyce Carol Oates, Maya Angelou, Edmund Morris, and Salman Rushdie. The two top-ranked books on the Board's list were *Ulysses* and *The Great Gatsby*. The other list was based on more than 200,000 votes cast online by anyone who wanted to vote. The top two on that list were *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) and *The Fountainhead* (1943). The two novels have had six-figure annual sales for decades, running at a combined 300,000 copies annually during the past ten years. In 2009, *Atlas Shrugged* alone sold a record 500,000 copies and Rand's four novels combined (the lesser two are *We the Living* [1936] and *Anthem* [1938]) sold more than 1,000,000 copies.

And yet for 27 years after her death in 1982, we haven't had a single scholarly biography of Ayn Rand. Who was this woman? How did she come to write such phenomenally influential novels? What are we to make of her legacy? These are the questions that finally have been asked and answered splendidly, with somewhat different emphases, in two new biographies published within weeks of each other: *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* by Jennifer Burns, an assistant professor of history at the University of Virginia, and *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* by Anne C. Heller, a former executive editor at Condé Nast Publications.

They are both big books, well written, exhaustively researched, and—remarkably, given their subject—judicious and disinterested. Both authors strike just the right tone in describing Rand's complicated life and personality, betraying neither animus nor infatuation. Choosing between them is a matter of tastes and interests. Burns's book offers more analysis of Rand's political activities and influence and less detail about Rand's personal life than Heller's. As someone who has known some of the principals in the drama and has been curious to learn the details from a detached perspective, I was drawn to Heller's lavishly detailed portrait of Rand the person, but that's a matter of my own tastes and interests.

In both Burns's and Heller's accounts, the vibrant, brilliant woman of ideas shines through. Hour after hour the talk would continue in her New York apartment during the 1950s, sometimes all night, with Rand surrounded by her acolytes. Everyone seems to agree that this was Rand at her best. They also agree that she was spectacularly good at making her case. This was the Ayn Rand I once saw at Boston's Ford Hall Forum in the early 1960s: confident, incisive, fielding all questions, taking no prisoners. *Charismatic* is an overused word, but with Rand, it fits.

Charm was part of that charisma. Heller describes the pleasure that Bennett Cerf, *Atlas Shrugged*'s publisher, took in introducing Rand to his liberal friends. Writer and critic Clifton Fadiman had been one of the models for the detestable Ellsworth Toohey in *The Fountainhead*, but when Cerf brought them together Rand entranced Fadiman, and they talked until three in the morning. Playwright George Axelrod, another lib-

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eral friend of Cerf's, pronounced after a dinner at Rand's apartment that "[s]he knows me better after five hours than my analyst does after five years."

Both biographers also describe a kinder, gentler Rand who was just as real as the fierce intellectual combatant. To Martin Anderson, Ronald Reagan's long-time advisor, she was a "pussycat," who alone among a crowd at a café noticed that Anderson couldn't get his package of cream open (he had a broken arm) and helped him prepare his coffee. Joan Kennedy Taylor, for whose wedding Rand was matron of honor, once told me about Rand shushing Joan's objections when a recently widowed friend talked about rejoining her husband in heaven. If it gave her comfort, Rand said, Joan had no business trying to convince her she was wrong. There are repeated examples in both biographies of the ways in which Rand could be a sensitive, loyal, and affectionate friend.

But there's no getting around it: taken as a whole, there is a dismaying discrepancy between the Ayn Rand of real life and Ayn Rand as she presented herself to the world. The discrepancy is important because Rand herself made such a big deal about living a life that was the embodiment of her philosophy. "My personal life is a postscript to my novels," she wrote in the afterword to *Atlas Shrugged*. "It consists of the sentence: '*And I mean it.*' I have always lived by the philosophy I present in my books—and it has worked for me, as it works for my characters." As both books document, that statement was self-delusion on a grand scale.

After *Atlas Shrugged* was published in 1957, Rand and her chief disciple Nathaniel Branden converted the themes of her novels into a philosophy that they labeled "Objectivism." Objectivism takes as its metaphysical foundation the existence of reality that is unchanged by anything that an observer might think about it—"A is A," as Aristotle put it, and as Rand often repeated in her own work. Objectivism's epistemology is based on the capacity of the human mind to perceive reality through reason, and the adamant assertion that reason is the *only* way to perceive reality. In Rand's view, notions of intuition or spiritual insight were hokum.

One of the extensions of these premises to daily life is that "[o]ne must never attempt to fake reality in any manner," in words from *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1964) that appear in variations throughout Rand's work. To fake reality despoils that which makes human beings human. Wishful thinking, unrealistic hopes, duplicity, refusal to take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions—all these amount to faking reality and, to Rand, were despicable. But Rand herself faked reality throughout her life, beginning in small ways and ending with the construction of a delusional alternative reality that took over her life.

It began innocently in Russia, where Rand, born Alissa Rosenbaum in 1905, spent her childhood as the daughter of a prosperous Jewish pharmacist in pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg, experienced the Bolshevik Revolution as a teenager, and graduated from university in Lenin's new USSR. One of the signal contributions of both biographies is to open up this previously ignored but crucial period in Rand's life. Little Alissa, nicknamed Ayinotchka and sometimes called Ayin by her father (a delicious tidbit from Heller's research that calls into question all the other theories about the origin of "Ayn"), was a brilliant but socially awkward child who found her escape in books and, later, films. Nothing wrong with that—it would be odd if a novelist did not have an active fantasy life as a child. But you cannot understand Rand the adult until you understand how central those fictional worlds were to her interior life.

Her predilection for faking reality as an adult first emerged in the conflict between the reality of her husband, Frank O'Connor, and her image of him. O'Connor was a handsome bit-part actor Rand met soon after moving to Hollywood in 1927—in Heller's words, a "sweet, gallant, stoic, funny, emotionally inexpressive, easily led, and profoundly passive" man who drank too much, was never the one who initiated sex, never brought in much income, and in his own eyes was always "Mr. Ayn Rand." And yet Rand herself always insisted that O'Connor was a Randian hero in the mold of *The Fountainhead*'s Howard Roark. It never made any sense to friends who knew them both.

Her idealization of O'Connor had an endearing aspect—Rand genuinely loved him and remained devoted to him through his long, sad decline in old age. But her self-delusion could be hurtful. O'Connor was happiest and most productive on their 13-acre ranch in the San Fernando Valley where they lived in the last half of the 1940s, and was miserable when Rand unilaterally decided they would move to New York in 1951. She always pretended that Frank had hated California too ("You feel the same way, don't you, Frank?" she would say insistently whenever the subject came up), even though everybody knew—surely including Rand, her friends thought—that the move had caused him lasting pain. That's called faking reality to protect yourself from acknowledging the consequences of your own actions—a mortal sin in Randian ethics.

There was her 30-year use of amphetamines, beginning with Benzedrine in 1942, as she was rushing to complete *The Fountainhead*, and continuing with Dexedrine and Dexamyl into the 1970s. Until now it has been described as a two-pill-a-day prescription for weight control, but evidence in Heller's book indicates that it wasn't seen that way by everyone. As early as 1945, her then-close friend, journalist Isabel Paterson, was berating her in letters with passages such as, "Stop taking that benzedrine, you idiot. I don't care what excuse you have—stop it." Heller presents other evidence that Rand had periods of heavy use in the 1950s and '60s. But the exact extent of her dependence on amphetamines is peripheral here to the broader self-delusion. As anyone who has had the experience knows, a good way to get a really, really distorted sense of reality is to swallow a couple of Dexedrines. If you want to take them anyway, don't go around bragging that you never "fake reality in any manner."

There was her repeated claim that she owed no philosophical debt to anyone except Aristotle. It would be more accurate to say that everything in Objectivism is derivative of ideas that thinkers from John Locke to Adam Smith to Friedrich Nietzsche had expressed before. That's the way advances come about—in Isaac Newton's famous words, by standing on the shoulders of giants. But Newton, like other important thinkers, knew it and acknowledged it. By insisting that Objectivism had sprung full blown from her own mind, with just a little help from Aristotle, Rand was being childish, as well as out of touch with reality.

There was her affair with Nathaniel Branden. It began in 1955 with an open declaration to her husband and Branden's wife that the affair would take place—no faking of reality in that instance—but ended in 1968 with Rand demonstrating beyond doubt that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. She expelled Branden from the Objectivist movement, tried to get a publisher to block publication of one of his books, and falsely alleged financial shenanigans by him, all accompanied by a 53-paragraph statement to her followers about the reasons for repudiating Branden (including the sentence, "I do not fake reality and never have") that was a deception from beginning to end. That's called maliciously faking reality to get vengeance and to protect one's image.

Finally, there was the cult surrounding Rand that developed during the 1960s. Reasoned discourse with Rand became impossible unless you began by accepting her pronouncements about everything—*then* you could argue the logic of your position. What had been lively back-and-forth explorations of ideas in the early 1950s became sessions at which the students sat at the feet of the master, "shivering, scared children who dared not say the wrong thing lest they incur her wrath," in the words of John Hospers. The lifelong aspect of Rand's personality that had fueled the brilliance of her novels, the ca-

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pacity to imagine the world as she wanted it to be rather than the world as it is, had taken over real life. She had constructed a reality in which, if she so decreed, A was Z, and she lived within it for the rest of her life.

WHY THEN HAS READING THESE BIOGraphies of a deeply flawed woman—putting it gently—made me want to go back and reread her novels yet again? The answer is that Rand was a hedgehog who got a few huge truths right, and expressed those truths in her fiction so powerfully that they continue to inspire each new generation. They have only a loose relationship with Objectivism as a philosophy (which was formally developed only after the novels were written). Are selfishness and greed cardinal virtues in Objectivism? Who cares? Does Objectivist aesthetics denigrate Bach and Mozart? Who cares? Objectivism has nothing to do with what mesmerizes people about *The Fountainhead* or *Atlas Shrugged*. What does mesmerize us? Fans of Ayn Rand will answer differently. Part of the popularity of the books derives from the many ways their themes can be refracted. Here is what I saw in Rand's fictional world that shaped my views as an adolescent and still shapes them 50 years later.

First, Rand expressed the glory of human achievement. She tapped into the delight that a human being ought to feel at watching another member of our species doing things superbly well. The scenes in *The Fountainhead* in which the hero, Howard Roark, realizes his visions of architectural truth are brilliant evocations of human creativity at work. But I also loved scenes like the one in *Atlas Shrugged* when protagonist Dagny Taggart is in the cab of the locomotive on the first run on the John Galt line, going at record speed, and glances at the engineer:

> He sat slumped forward a little, relaxed, one hand resting lightly on the throttle as if by chance; but his eyes were fixed on the track ahead. He had the ease of an expert, so confident that it seemed casual, but it was the ease of a tremendous concentration, the concentration on one's task that has the ruthlessness of an absolute.

That's a heroic vision of a blue-collar worker doing his job. There are many others. Critics often accuse Rand of portraying a few geniuses as the only people worth valuing. That's not what I took away from her. I saw her celebrating people who did their work well and condemning people who settled for less, in great endeavors or small; celebrating those who took responsibility for their lives, and condemning those who did not. That sounded right to me in 1960 and still sounds right in 2010.

Second, Ayn Rand portrayed a world I wanted to live in, not because I would be rich or powerful in it, but because it consisted of people I wanted to be around. As conditions deteriorate in *Atlas Shrugged*, the first person to quit in disgust at Hank Rearden's steel mill is Tom Colby, head of the company union:

> For ten years, he had heard himself denounced throughout the country, because his was a "company union" and because he had never engaged in a violent conflict with the management. This was true; no conflict had ever been necessary; Rearden paid a higher wage scale than any union scale in the country, for which he demanded—and got—the best labor force to be found anywhere.

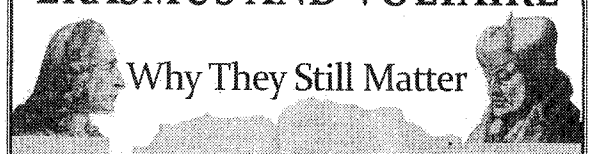
That's not a world of selfishness or greed. It's a world of cooperation and mutual benefit through the pursuit of self-interest, enabling satisfying lives not only for the Hank Reardens of the world but for factory workers. I still want to live there.

That world came together in the chapters of *Atlas Shrugged* describing Galt's Gulch, the chapters I most often reread when I go back to the book. The great men and women who have gone on strike are gathered there, sometimes working at their old professions, but more often being grocers and cabbage growers and plumbers, because that's the niche in which they can make a living. In scene after scene, Rand shows what such a community would be like, and it does not consist of isolated individualists holding one another at arm's length. Individualists, yes, but ones who have fun in one another's company, care about one another, and care for one another—not out of obligation, but out of mutual respect and spontaneous affection.

AYN RAND NEVER DWELT ON HER RUSSIAN childhood, preferring to think of herself as wholly American. Rightly so. The huge truths she apprehended and expressed were as American as apple pie. I suppose hardcore Objectivists will consider what I'm about to say heresy, but hardcore Objectivists are not competent to judge. The novels are what make Ayn Rand important. Better than any other American novelist, she captured the magic of what life in America is supposed to be. The utopia of her novels is not a utopia of greed. It is not a utopia of Nietzschean supermen. It is a utopia of human beings living together in Jeffersonian freedom.

Charles Murray is the W.H. Brady Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

ERASMUS AND VOLTAIRE



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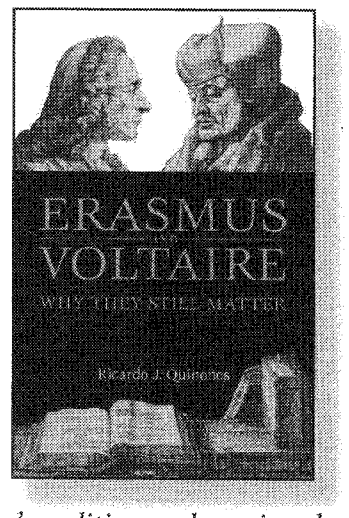

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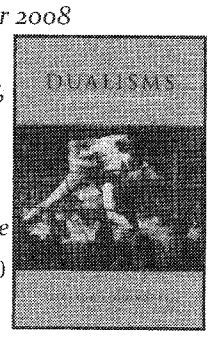

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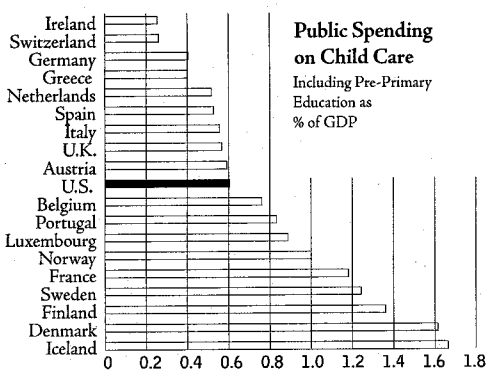
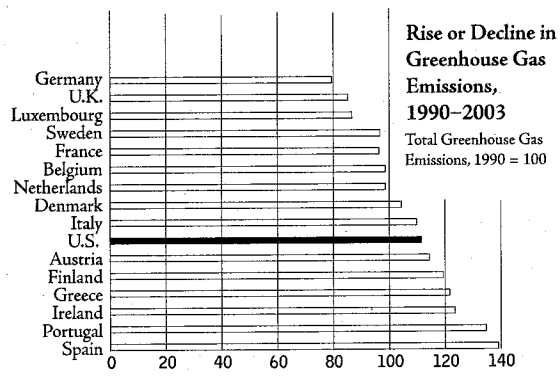
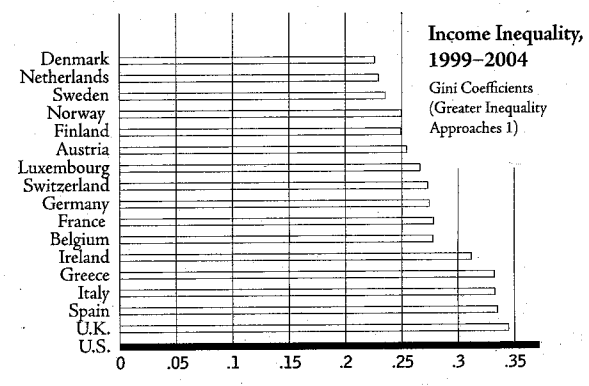
Book Review by Denis Boyles

Vive la Différence

The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe Are Alike, by Peter Baldwin.
Oxford University Press, 336 pages, $24.95







In January the new permanent president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, renewed the European Union's urgent call for a new tax. There was no time to waste: Brussels needed the dough to preserve what Van Rompuy called the "European way of life." As a statement released by his office last November put it, "The financing of the welfare state...will require new resources."

As the reaction against Obamacare demonstrated, if the president of the United States said he needed more money to preserve the "American way of life" and then made clear he meant ponying up more money for welfare schemes, most voters would wish him an unemployment check without delay. But they would be shocked to discover in Peter Baldwin's very amusing book, *The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe Are Alike*, that the "European way of life" pretty much describes how people in, say, Iowa live.

In fact, Baldwin, a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles, reached his conclusion in a distinctly Midwestern way: he harvested. Baldwin's numbers—fertilized by studies from the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and other international organizations and institutions, where statistics grow as thick and high as Iowa corn—fill his book. They show that despite our assumptions, despite a thousand op-eds, and a couple of centuries of squabbling and bickering, and even wars and revolutions, the statistical differences between Western Europe and America are trivial—in fact less than the differences between various European states. All that stuff about us Americans and them Europeans? Statistically speaking, *them* is *us*. *Incroyable, non?*

However, one vast difference between Europeans and Americans is in the mastery of groundless condescension. So this is a great book to take to a dinner party in Paris or to a curb-sweep in Glasgow. What can be more tiresome than meeting a hung-over Brit and waiting for the inevitable jibes about misery and mayhem, poverty and illiteracy in the U.S.A.? Let them eat Baldwin. They'll be shocked to learn that going by the numbers—on money and work, crime and violence, health care and education, the environment and the family—we're depressingly alike.

One graph after another in this highly contrarian and entertaining book shows a big black line indicating where America stands in the European tables, and it's almost always somewhere in the middle, often with Scandos and the make-believe Luxembourgers a notch or two above us, the British and Irish a notch or two below. In common with most other Western Europeans, we give thanks that we're not Portuguese, who seem to have a hard time with almost everything. The differences are as minor as Baldwin says: generally speaking, to use a term from the '60s, we are all bozos on this bus. We all work hard, raise families, pay taxes, and die—and we do these things in remarkably similar ways. When *Le Monde* ran its famous headline, "We are all Americans," on the morning of September 12, 2001, what they might have meant on any other day was "We are all middle-class people with weight problems who recycle and watch too much TV."

For those on the American left who love holding up European solutions for American problems, Baldwin's collection of discoveries will be a blow. Who knew that in the U.S., taxes are more progressive than in all of Europe? Or that American social welfare policies are as generous as Van Rompuy's cherished continental welfare state? Or that the Germans are even more litigious than Yanks? Or that for education, state spending byAmericans and Europeans is about the same and achieves about the same results? Or that Americans have been more successful in reducing carbon dioxide output per unit of GDP than nine European countries, some of them notoriously sanctimonious? Or that the French, Austrians, Swiss, Germans, and Italians—with their expensive public transportation networks—all own more passenger cars per capita than Americans do? Or that New Yorkers are the politest big-city residents on either side of the Atlantic? Fuggedaboutit! Europeans ridicule perceived American religiosity, yet, as Baldwin notes, "About a third of Germans, Austrians, and Irish, and even more French and Swiss, believe that fortune-tellers can foresee the future."

Baldwin is a graceful, often invigorating writer, a skill put to the test in a book that is largely commentary on bar graphs. Befitting a volume that looks at "outcomes, more than how they are achieved," he's careful to add helpful context to his stat-bound claims, explaining how different methods of data collection or how specific policies can alter or add nuance to the paint-by-numbers conclusions. *The Narcissism of Minor Differences* is ostensibly a polemic, and indeed the conclusions the book reaches are no doubt controversial. Yet there's very little rancor in it, almost none of the ideological toxicity that normally runs through books about countries, people, and ideas that are not our own.

As he admits, most Americans (outside the editorial offices of the *New York Times*) don't give a fig about whether or not they measure up to European standards on anything, including empathy. Europeans, on the other hand, and es-

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pecially the European media, are so preoccupied with America that the effect is sometimes comic. So this is an ideal book for certain European readers, including people who for whatever peculiar reason need to cling to anti-American perceptions as if they were accepted wisdom. Ideas that stateside have always been seen as marginalized paranoia—that 9/11 was the work of "Boosh," for example—do have a widespread following in Europe.

This bizarre obsession with diminishing a bizarre America has been well-documented. In *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism* (2005), Philippe Roger brilliantly archives 500 pages of deranged "differentiation" and outright bigotry by French writers, philosophers, and politicians. Seth D. Armus's *French Anti-Americanism (1930–1948): Critical Moments in a Complex History* (2007) may be more succinct but no less damning. One has the impression that what British journalist Godfrey Hodgson triumphantly calls *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (2009) is a straw man. As Barack Obama clumsily pointed out during a trip to Europe last year, "exceptionalism" is hardly unique to Americans. (Even Albanians have a sense of exceptionalism; during my visit a few years ago, I was repeatedly asked, "What do you think of Albania? Pretty bad, huh?")

But American exceptionalism, invented or real, has an exceptional usefulness for those tilters in need of a windmill. For a century or so, French, German, Italian, British, and Spanish politicians have all exploited anti-Americanism as a way of distracting voters from failed economic policies and doomed social experiments, just as European philosophers and writers have built careers pointing out American shortcomings from a European point of view, often in personal terms: Americans are fat, racist, uncaring, unfair, violent planetary polluters—all the myths Baldwin seeks to destroy. When Americans have written critically of Europe (and I'm one who has), it has been to point out the consequences of bad policies, especially foreign ones, and rampant hypocrisy. It will be forever before a person of African descent is elected to govern a European democracy, but to Europeans of a certain class and persuasion, American moral inferiority is simply assumed—something everybody just *knows*. "Today the U.S. is the most unequal of all the world's developed nations in terms of income and wealth distribution," a British professor of American Studies wrote, reviewing Hodgson's book in the *Times Literary Supplement*. He was apparently citing himself, but may have used Gini coefficients from a 1999–2004 Luxembourg Income Study cited by Baldwin. According to that study, the U.K. is only the smallest fraction off the U.S. numbers for wealth distribution. But if the data from these studies is averaged over the decades 1970–1990, the U.S. actually lags behind countries such as France and Ireland, and the data show that income equality in the U.K. has risen rapidly recently, while the U.S figures are relatively static.

The fact is no matter what variations in domestic policies politicians invent, no matter what rhetorical claims of convenience are cited by polemicists, no matter what books we read, what schools we attend, what cars we drive, what taxes we pay—when it comes to *outcomes*, we all end up at about the same place at about the same time.

This is especially true when difficult demographic and historical factors, such as the tragic consequences of slavery, are considered. "If we could strip out the urban underclass from the numbers, it seems a fair bet that the United States would be even less statistically distinguishable from Western Europe than I have shown that it already is," Baldwin writes toward the end of his book. "It might not be Sweden. But it would be like the Netherlands, France, or Germany, and more than hold its own vis-à-vis the Mediterranean or the U.K. and Ireland."

He doesn't ignore the differences that exist between the U.S. and some European nations. America's health care system comes under heavy criticism from Baldwin, for example—not because it performs worse than the European alternatives (although American infant mortality rates, because of a number of complicating factors, are difficult to accept), but because it's so expensive and inefficient and, he claims, unfair. Still, if you're stricken by cancer, pray it happens to you in America. After that, the distant second choice is between a number of European also-rans.

Actually, as Baldwin points out early in *The Narcissism of Minor Differences*, there is a greater differentiation between European states—especially between those in the north and those around the Mediterranean—than there is between America and Europe. Anecdotal evidence bears him out. The 2008 comedy *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, for example, is one of the most popular French films of the last decade. Its premise: people who live in the Nord-Pas de Calais region of France are simpletons when viewed through the sophisticated eyes of people from Provence just as Londoners laugh at the unfortunate denizens of Leeds, or as New Yorkers ridicule all those Midwestern Republicans out there in "Jesusland" (except when they vote for Democrats). It's like the old Tom Lehrer song: the Dutch really do hate the Germans, and the Germans really do hate the Poles. Baldwin poses the question perfectly: "Hand on heart, which cities more resemble each other: Stockholm and Minneapolis or Helsinki and Thessaloniki?"

And this brings us to another point. Distinctions often are more important—and even more appealing—than similarities. Who cares whether Italians watch as much TV as Americans? Celebrating differences is a great, global pleasure. We all define ourselves apophatically; we may not always agree on who we are, but we know who we aren't, and we aren't *them*, whoever they are, no matter what the outcomes say. Understanding this love of difference makes bearable the disappointment in reading all these figures that prove Baldwin's point. After all, when we leave the familiar, we want things to be different. Who wants to land in Paris and stop at a McDonald's on your way into town? We want the natives and their quaint folkways, thank you very much.

Fortunately, the differences are there. Baldwin ably charts the minor ones. But stats can't effectively demonstrate the major differences, with their paradoxes and pleasures. In the small village in rural western France where I live, the annual Festival of the Bean this year featured a guy dressed as Sinatra singing "New York, New York" in phonetically perfect English. He was followed by a demonstration of Texas line-dancing—an annual festival favorite—performed by Breton and Vendéan women from Nantes dressed in white cowgirl outfits. But it was a purely French event; the associations with the United States were actually very minor. The dancing might have been straight from Texas, but that didn't make the event an American one, any more than saloon girls dancing a can-can makes a French film out of an American western.

Minor differences test the imagination. Some are slightly absurd. For example, drive just five miles north of the Kansas-Nebraska border, an imaginary line if ever there was one, and talk about the virtues of Jayhawks and many, many Husker supporters will help you discover subtle points of differentiation. And there are minor differences that can make you choke on fear. The distinction between North and South Korea may be laughably artificial, but that makes it no less deadly to the Koreans who stand in towers watching each other through binoculars across another invisible line.

According to Peter Baldwin, Americans and Europeans are cousins, identical cousins. We laugh alike and walk alike, and at times we even talk alike. But the differences that matter most are things that can't be measured: history, culture, class, emotions, humor, optimism, families. These aren't found on bar graphs, but are calibrated closely in the mind.

Denis Boyles teaches at The Brouzils Seminars in France and is the author, most recently, of Superior Nebraska: The Common Sense Values of America's Heartland *(Doubleday).*

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Book Review by Fred Siegel

Insatiable Liberalism

Never Enough: America's Limitless Welfare State, by William Voegeli.
Encounter Books, 310 pages, $23.95

President Obama's vertiginous fall from political grace, and the corresponding ascent of the Tea Party movement, have been the subject of extensive discussion. Strikingly, the account that sheds the most light on these developments mentions neither. William Voegeli's new book, *Never Enough: America's Limitless Welfare State*, was written just before Obama's outsized liberal aspirations provoked the Tea Parties to emerge. But it provides far and away the most substantial explanation to date of our current political condition.

Liberalism's most acute critics such as University of Virginia political scientist James Ceaser emphasize the centrality of crises, real or manufactured, in expanding the size and reach of the liberal state (as in the recent case of the supposedly imminent global warming catastrophe). In *Never Enough*, Voegeli, a visiting scholar at Claremont McKenna College's Henry Salvatori Center and a contributing editor of this journal, points to a complementary concept: liberalism, he argues, "lacks a limiting principle." This boundlessness, as it might be described, is familiar to Americans across the country who have watched, for instance, secondary school costs and college tuitions grow at roughly twice the rate of inflation for a quarter-century now. This boundlessness generates some of the apprehension that animates the Tea Parties. As a friend asked me rhetorically—referring to the fact that the failing schools in Washington, D.C., spend $28,000 a year per pupil while Harvard tuition costs $34,000 a year—"When will enough be enough?" The same question could be asked regarding federal and state spending. Liberals, Voegeli explains, sometimes avoid trying to answer these sorts of questions by execrating as greedy racists those who ask them.

Liberals found a warrant for expansive government in their reconceptualization of the American republic. *The Federalist* had grounded government and rights in the imperfections of human nature. The proto-liberals of the Progressive era, who had drunk deeply of Darwinism, disposed of the notion of an inherent human nature. Like Woodrow Wilson, they were done with "blind" worship of the Constitution. Their concept of rights flowed from the felt necessities of history as it unfolded. History required, as Wilson argued, that "[t]he government of a country so vast and various must be strong, prompt, wieldy and efficient." Highly trained, disinterested experts, the products of university education, were to wield this powerful instrument untethered from Madisonian restraints and guided by visionary insight into the direction of history. Of course, notes Voegeli, "the dubious authority asserted by those who claim they can see farther over the horizon than the rest of us is, among other things, a way to make their own political preferences cast a bigger shadow."

Those exercising the new science of government would (the Progressives argued) break with tradition through social experiments. And they would be bound, as a matter of disinterested intellectual honesty, by the outcomes of those experiments. In his 1932 Oglethorpe University Address, Franklin Roosevelt famously called for "bold, persistent experimentation" as a matter of "common sense." He promised that he would try one method and "if it fails, admit it frankly and try another." But when the corporatist program he adopted with the National Recovery Administration (NRA) failed to stimulate the Depression economy, it was ended not by an administration willing to acknowledge its errors, but by the Supreme Court. The *New Republic*'s Jonathan Chait still peddles this shopworn argument, insisting that because liberalism is "rooted in experimentation and the rejection of ideological certainty" "everything works on a case-by-case basis." But as Voegeli notes, there is from the NRA to AFDC no known example of this adherence to the experimental method.

If the outcomes disappointed, Progressives could always claim good intentions. This now

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hoary claim received its classic formulation in FDR's 1936 "Rendezvous with Destiny" speech to the Democratic National Convention. "Divine justice," he insisted, "weighs the sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted on different scales. Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference." But as the writers of *The Federalist* clearly understood, self-interest so overwhelms evidence that no program will be deemed an unambiguous failure as long as it provides employment for those who work in it. That last category—those who work in government—has proved crucial for the Progressive project.

Neoliberals such as Charles Peters of the *Washington Monthly* tried in the 1980s and '90s to provide liberalism with a limiting principle. For Peters, neoliberals were Democrats who were "against a fat, sloppy and smug bureaucracy." "We want a government," he insisted, "that can fire people who can't or won't do the job." For a time President Clinton straddled the line between neoliberals and statist liberals, explaining that "more government is not an aim in itself." But the Clinton presidency, for all his electoral success, was for liberals merely an interregnum. Clintonism was denounced for failing to expand the welfare state, which was deemed the true purpose of an increasingly liberal Democratic Party. After Clinton, Voegeli explains, liberalism returned to the belief that "every genuine need corresponds to a right to have that need addressed." Or in other words, "every problem deserves a program," and since there is no end of problems, there must be an ever expanding public-sector work force. In the first decade of the 21st century, public-sector workers, with their propensity to expand the state out of their own self-interest, became central players in the Democratic Party.

After John Kerry's defeat in 2004, Michael Tomasky, then-editor of the liberal monthly the *American Prospect*, tried to introduce the limiting principle of "the common good" into liberalism. As a writer for the *Village Voice* and *New York* magazine, Tomasky had observed firsthand the self-destruction of David Dinkins's liberal mayoralty (1989–93) in New York, and he was disturbed by the tendency of rights claims to trump all other considerations. The rights of criminals and welfare recipients, he noted, flourished even as the city declined. Putting a more positive face on his call for the politics of "the common good" in the *American Prospect*, Tomasky argued that Democrats have "a more than respectable roster of policy proposals" but they lack "a philosophy, a big idea that unites their proposals and converts them from a hodgepodge of narrow and specific fixes into a vision for society." But Tomasky's efforts to promote a "common good" liberalism were overwhelmed by the interest-group energies unleashed by the 2004 Howard Dean presidential bid, energies which in turn helped propel Barack Obama to the White House.

WHY HAS LIBERALISM BEEN UNABLE TO constrain itself—why does it repeatedly overreach? Voegeli touches on this question only in passing references to liberalism's sense of itself as endowed with a secular but nonetheless consecrated mission. He notes that in the midst of the 1950s prosperity Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., called on liberalism to "fight spiritual unemployment as it once fought economic unemployment." And Voegeli perceptively notes the continuity between the aims of the Great Society and the Aquarians of the New Left. As Lyndon Johnson explained, the Great Society was about more than fighting poverty; it wanted to "build a richer life of mind and spirit," a society not "condemned to a soulless wealth" but one where "man turned the exploits of his genius to the full enrichment of his life."

Far more than contemporary liberals like to acknowledge, liberalism was born of something like a full-fledged ideology. Liberalism's seminal preceptors in America—Herbert Croly, Randolph Bourne, and H.G. Wells—saw it as a doctrine capable of competing with the other 20th-century "isms" of socialism, Bolshevism, and fascism. Liberalism, which distinguished itself in part by its call (not always respected) for freedom of thought, was joined to the other isms by its unattainable quest for a secular soteriology, a political path to salvation. Like the others, modern liberalism was born of a new class of politically self-conscious intellectuals who despised both the individual businessman's pursuit of profit and the average individual's pursuit of a conventional life, both of which were made possible by the lineaments of the limited 19th-century state. Like the others, liberalism was strongly influenced by the Nietzschean ideal of a true aristocracy that might serve as a counterpoint to what were seen as the debasements of modern commercial society shorn of traditional hierarchies.

"Democracy," said liberalism's pre-eminent founding father Herbert Croly, "must stand or fall on a platform of possible human perfectibility." These were the words of a radical, not a reformer—a man who, like Karl Marx and Auguste Comte, saw himself as leading humanity to a higher and more refined stage of civilization. Croly wanted the collective power of society put "at the service of its ablest members," who would be given the lead roles in the social drama of Progress. Boundlessness is built into the DNA of American liberalism.

Liberalism was to be a new covenant in which the priests of Progress led the people into the promised land of a full blown European-style welfare state. But in the intervening century, two of the key building blocks of liberalism—namely the concept of Progress and the popular appeal of government—have become problematic, the first for liberals themselves and the second for much of the populace.

The rise of the environmental movement was the death knell for traditional liberal notions of Progress. Success was reconceptualized as averting one version or another of the supposedly imminent apocalypse—the population bomb, nuclear winter, global warming, etc. As for the adoration of government, the new aristocracy envisioned by Croly, Bourne, and Wells was supposed to be composed of superior people who acted disinterestedly through the centralized state in the name of advancing humanity. But a century later the landscape is littered with expensive programs and institutions created to advance that vision, many of which have less than glorious records.

Still, as Voegeli makes clear, government has continued its relentless expansion. Voegeli's conservative hopes are chastened by the fact that the United State has, when it comes to social spending, become less of an exceptional nation. Notwithstanding Reaganism and the rise of the conservative movement, the American trend from 1980–2007 has been a steady growth in the percentage of the economy devoted to the welfare state, a percentage in line with almost all modern developed democracies.

Liberals have continued to expand government on a federal, state, and local level through a very effective game of misdirection. By clouding the skies "with criss-crossing dollars," Voegeli explains, "the welfare state manages people's perceptions of its costs and benefits to encourage them to believe an impossibility: that every household can be a net importer of the wealth redistributed by the government." Liberals have thus devoted great efforts to making benefits overt and costs covert, taxes on the very wealthy excepted. The problem with this approach is that states such as California, New York, and New Jersey that adopt this supposedly win-win game of redistribution have ended up hemorrhaging educated, middle class, and high-income taxpayers. The upshot is that even the net beneficiaries of such cross-subsidies may end up feeling shortchanged in the process. In New York City, teachers who have benefited from wage increases that are double the rate of inflation find that they still can't afford the rents in a city that raises the cost of housing by subsidizing not only poor but also middle-income households.

One response would be for liberals to support the means-testing of social benefits. But when

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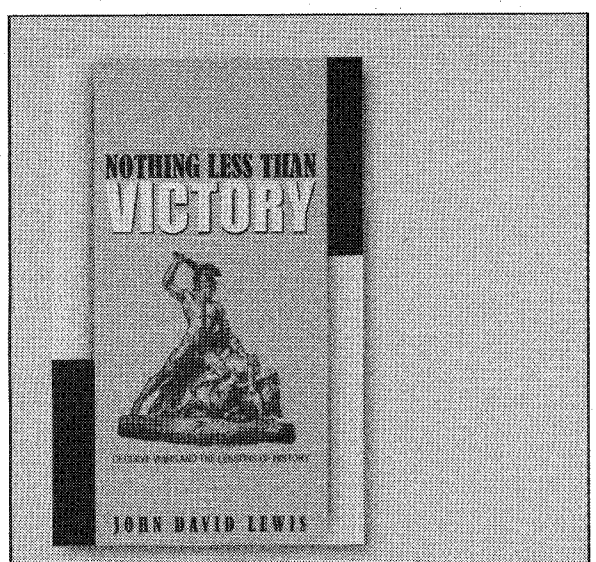

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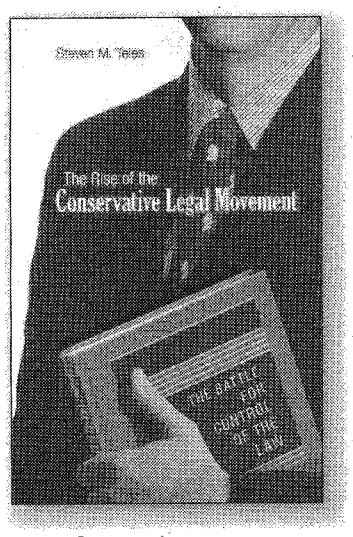

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Charles Peters argued for this he was shouted down. Liberals felt the game of cross-subsidies, notwithstanding their expense and dysfunction, was crucial to attaching the middle class to an expanding state. The upshot, as in the fight over Obamacare, is that the liberals are increasingly committed to a lack of transparency.

Voegeli's response to the continued expansion of the federal government social-welfare expenditures is two-fold. First, he argues, instead of talking about the evils of big government, Americans need to ask why the welfare state regularly produces bad government. In that vein, he can point to a deep blue state like New Jersey, which has one of the highest tax burdens in the country to fund its redistributive programs; nearly half of the roads in this suburban state are in disrepair, compared to the national average of 13%. Secondly, Voegeli hopes that government will learn to use to best advantage the resources the American people *are* willing to devote to the welfare state.

For all of Voegeli's good sense, matters may not be as bleak as he suggests. Three important dynamics may end up serving to restrain the growth of government. In their ascending order of importance:

First, liberalism has long been fueled by the complex interaction between grievances and guilt. At their best, liberals are sensitive to real grievances. Conservatives rightly point to the underside of the Progressives' attack on the Constitution. But in discussing the Progressive era conservatives such as Voegeli rarely deal with the extensive suffering produced by rapid industrialization. Unlike contemporary academic liberals, the Progressives didn't have to sniff out oppression in the obscure corners of unintelligible texts. They could point to the all-too visible reality of child labor. The grievances of the suffering were a legitimate weight on the guilty consciences of Progressives. Similarly, the moral high point of modern liberalism came between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s when liberals took the lead in opposing segregation. But, notes Voegeli, the notion of "[r]ights, which aren't grounded in nature but determined by the evolving flow of history" allowed liberals "to quickly pivot from color blindness to racial preferences." In the years since color blindness was replaced by affirmative action, liberal guilt and victim group grievance have danced a *pas de deux*. In this ballet the leaders of aggrieved groups have pushed liberals to assuage their anger, real or contrived, by imposing costs on the unorganized middle class, while not incidentally creating public-sector jobs for liberals who are then employed to ride righteous herd on the racist, sexist, and classist masses.

But the current attempt to stage a version of the liberal ballet on health care has been a notorious flop, despite the passage of Obamacare. The New Deal and the Great Society both took hold in eras without mass immigration. The attempt to expand the welfare state loses legitimacy in the midst of public anxiety about how to secure our borders. Most Americans see Obamacare as welfare of sorts, a transfer of resources from long-time citizens to new arrivals. The public is neither sufficiently guilty, nor the grievances of the "victims" sufficiently compelling, for the dynamic to work. New immigrants, a substantial number of whom are illegal, don't engage the sympathies of moderately liberal swing voters whose acquiescence is essential for liberal schemes.

Second, liberalism has long prided itself on its high-mindedness, its disinterested concern for the public good. It counterpoised itself to the money-grubbing interests of petty bourgeois individualism. But its increasing dependence on the political muscle of public-sector workers makes the claim of high-mindedness unsalable. Thanks to the fiscal crunch that has taken hold largely but not entirely in the Blue States, the public has become increasingly aware of the fact that public-sector workers are better compensated both in terms of salary and benefits than their private sector counterparts.

Third, liberalism in Voegeli's words is "having trouble meeting payroll" in a federal system in which the middle class can exit for greener pastures. The rise of public-sector union political power has produced a rapid rise in pension costs which are exacerbating the costs of paying for social welfare programs. Consider again, for example, deep blue liberal New Jersey which hasn't elected a Republican senator since 1976 and which, until this year, hadn't elected a Republican statewide official since 1997. In February 2008 the *New York Times* hailed New Jersey as the Northeast's most Progressive state. But between 2000 and 2008 that "Progressivism" cost the state 163,000 native households and $12.8 billion in gross income. The upshot was the election of a Republican Governor, Chris Christie, who threw down this unprecedented gauntlet: "If you are unemployed and support tax increases, be ready to stay unemployed. If you are working and support the job killing taxes that some will advocate today, you may be next to lose your job."

This year, the insatiability of public-sector demands in New Jersey produced an $11 billion deficit in a $29 billion budget. That gap was created because the price of state and local taxes per person had tripled in the past 20 years. Governor Christie has been compelled to challenge the public-sector unions not only on the state but also the local level as never before:

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While New Jersey's private sector lost 121,000 jobs just in 2009, New Jersey's local governments added 11,300 new municipal and school employees. 11,300 new government employees paid for by your taxes just this last year. 11,300 new employees added while you are struggling to keep your job and pay the bills. We must give the voters the tools to stop the madness and stop it this year.

Christie asked, "is it fair to have any public employees getting 4-5% salary increases every year, even when inflation is zero percent, paid for by citizens struggling" to make ends meet? In his opening bargaining position with the Democrat-dominated legislature, he proposed to close the largest budget gap (percentage-wise) in the nation almost entirely with cuts out of public spending. And to clear the sky of some of those criss-crossing subsidies, Christie has proposed means-testing of sorts by ending all state aid to the wealthiest school districts. Christie is sure to face stiff interest-group opposition, but right now he has public opinion behind him, and should he make significant headway his posture is likely to be imitated in the many state capitals facing similar circumstances.

BOUNDLESSNESS, IT TURNS OUT, HAS TO BE paid for, as we're about to discover when we start shelling out for the federal takeover of the health industry. Further, with a pension tsunami coming toward the states and localities, any attempt to expand government on the state and local level is likely to be met not only with stiff resistance but, in a federal system of states forced to compete globally, with serious attempts to reduce the cost of government. The coming years may well be politically dominated by intertwining attempts, on every level of government, to roll back the state.

Never Enough, the best book written on liberalism in recent decades, is an essential read for understanding how we came to this pass. It articulates the understandings of what the Tea Partiers fear and denounce but aren't able to explain. What's missing, however, is the sense of how liberalism transformed itself over time from believing in the possibilities of human perfectibility, to believing in government as an inexhaustible source of patronage and entitlements. The rapaciousness of this new framework may undermine itself. If so, Voegeli's well-argued critique will have been too pessimistic.

Fred Siegel is professor of history and humanities at The Cooper Union, and author of The Prince of the City: Giuliani, New York and the Genius of American Life *(Encounter Books).*

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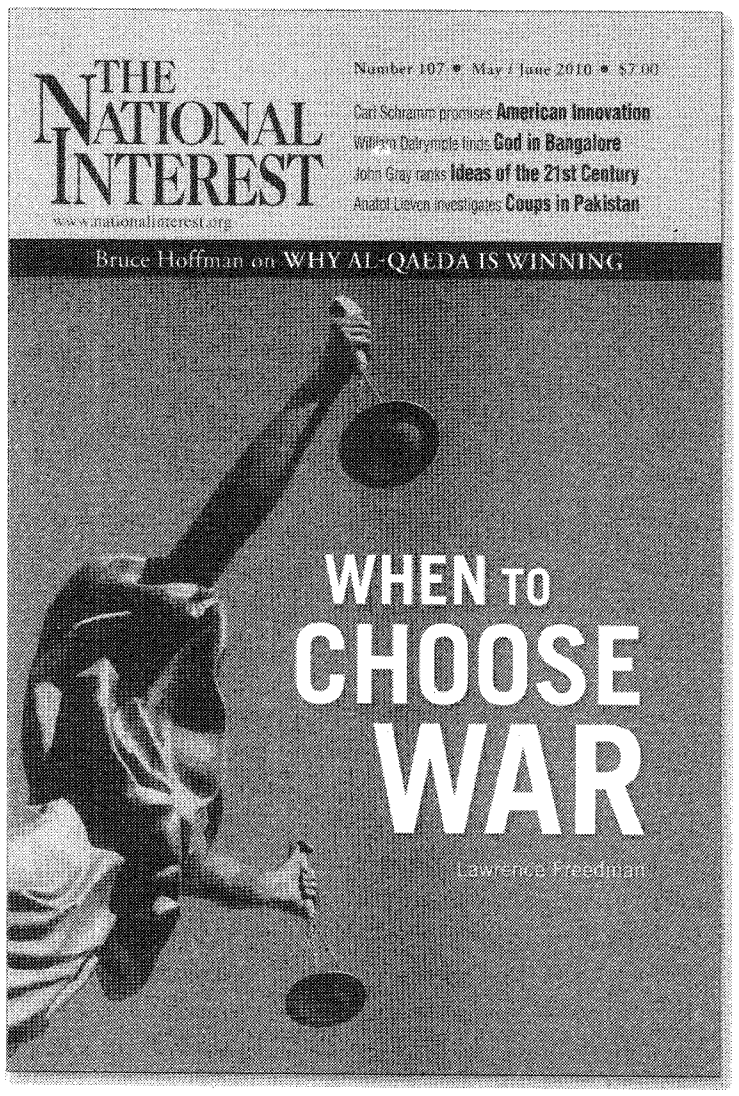

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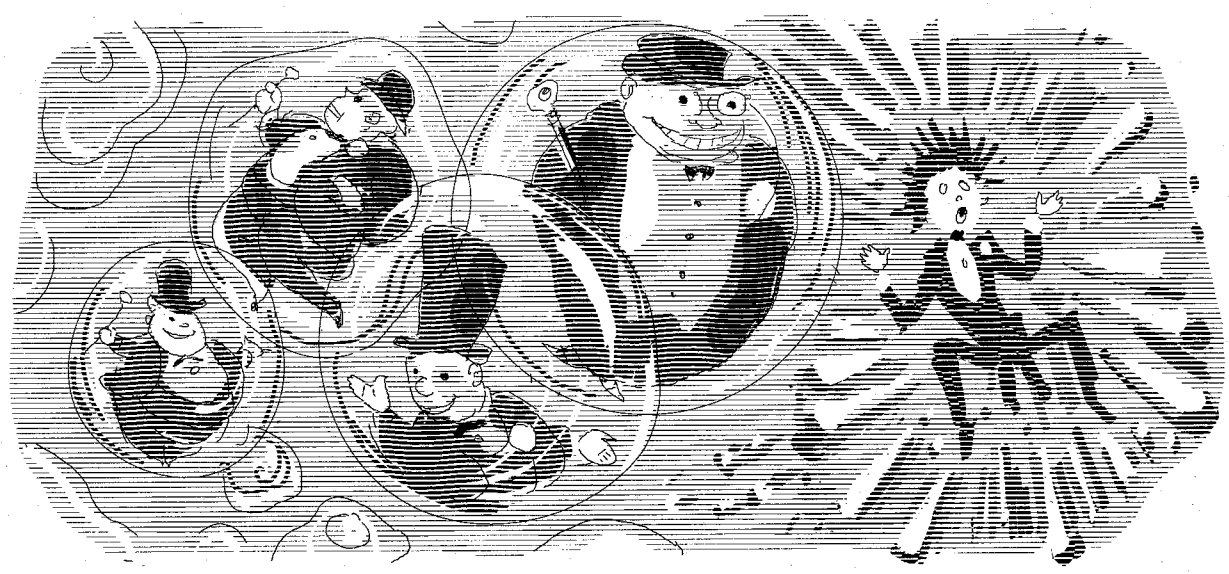
Essay by Robert J. Samuelson

Bubbles, Bubbles, Toils and Troubles



It seems astonishing that only a few years ago—perhaps five, certainly ten—the possibility of a major financial crisis striking the American and world economies appeared nonsensical. Hardly anyone thought or worried about it. To be sure, investors, bankers, corporate executives, government officials, and economists knew that the financial system (basically: banking plus investing) could behave erratically. But few believed that the system's excesses were so dangerous that they might trigger a calamitous chain reaction of losses, panic, and paralysis that would bring the world to the brink of a second Great Depression: precisely what happened from late 2007 to mid-2009.

Almost everyone assumed that advances in economic knowledge and government regulation, along with the increased dominance of financial markets by professionals—bankers, investment bankers, and portfolio managers for pensions and other large investors—had created firewalls against catastrophe. Deposit insurance, enacted in 1933, precluded old-fashioned banking panics. People wouldn't withdraw their money at the first hint of trouble, because they knew that the government would protect their savings. Mistakes in the pricing of stocks, bonds, and other securities would be largely self-correcting, because market professionals would see them as money-making opportunities. If bubbles burst, the Federal Reserve could act—lowering interest rates, easing credit—to limit the damage to the "real economy" of production and jobs.

This faith in progress has been the biggest casualty of the crisis. At best, we overstated our understanding of the economic system and our ability to manipulate it. At worst, our loss of control is crippling. Some might argue just the opposite: that the crisis vindicated the belief in progress and showed that governments and economists had learned the lessons of the 1930s. After all, the next Great Depression didn't happen. The Federal Reserve and other central banks responded. Governments enacted "stimulus" packages of new spending and tax cuts. Large declines in production, employment, and international trade didn't feed on themselves. But it was a close call, and it is not clear that in a future crisis similar measures could be mechanically deployed with equal success.

The Paradox of Finance

Finance is at the heart of our vulnerability. Predictably, bankers, investment bankers, traders, and money managers have become standard villains in the conventional crisis narrative. They are no longer "masters of the universe," to use Tom Wolfe's phrase. Rather, they're overpaid, greedy, and short-sighted predators. Finance is disparaged as an anti-social, parasitic activity that exists mainly for the self-enrichment of Wall Street. "Financial engineers" created exotic securities designed to extract fees from others and to generate profits for traders. This caricature is understandable—and wrong.

Broadly defined, the purpose of finance is to provide ways for society to save and invest, to give people and firms a choice between spending now and spending later, to match borrowers and lenders. Without reliable ways to save, societies would remain mostly present-oriented, and investment in new productive capacity and technologies—the foundation of economic growth—would be hamstrung. People would bury their savings. Businesses could only invest from accumulated profits. Households would strain to save for future needs—retirement, college, unexpected illnesses—because their savings would earn no returns. They would also have to defer many desires (buying a car, taking a long vacation) until they had ample savings to do so.

Since World War II, numerous financial innovations have created large public benefits. Credit cards have made it easier for consumers to borrow. Venture capital funds have financed new technologies and industries, notably, personal computers and many internet applications. Junk bonds have given non-blue chip companies another source of borrowing aside from banks, as well as providing financing to buy and break-up unwieldy conglomerates. The liberalization of mortgages helped millions of Americans to become homeowners. All good.

But there was a catch. In each of these cases, the process went to destructive excess. Venture capital firms financed too many dubious dot-com startups, contributing to the tech bubble

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of the late 1990s. Credit cards were marketed at excessive interest rates to many households that couldn't handle them. Junk bonds encouraged some companies to assume too much debt, leading to bankruptcy. And most menacingly, the liberalization of home mortgages spawned the brutal crisis of 2007–09. The paradox of modern finance is thus silhouetted: advanced economies require sophisticated financial systems, but these also threaten economic stability. Is it possible to defeat the paradox? That is the long-term question posed by the crisis.

All Fall Down

HISTORY ISN'T REASSURING. IN THEIR new book, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, economists Carmen Reinhart of the University of Maryland and Kenneth Rogoff of Harvard have performed the most comprehensive review ever of financial crises. Examining 66 countries over eight centuries, they find regular instability. Since World War II, almost every major European country has suffered a major banking crisis, according to Reinhart's and Rogoff's tabulation. The United Kingdom has endured four. For the United States, their count is two: the savings and loan collapse of the 1980s, and the 2007–09 financial collapse.

A severe banking crisis damages the broader economy. Borrowing, lending, and investing contract or collapse, as financial institutions hoard cash and see many past investments go sour. Consumer confidence and purchasing power drop if, lacking government insurance, depositors lose money. Many financial institutions become either insolvent (meaning their assets are worth less than their liabilities) or "illiquid" (meaning that they cannot meet their depositors' demand for cash, because most of their cash is tied up in outstanding loans). In a crisis, the distinction between insolvency and illiquidity often blurs, because outstanding loans and investments (say, in bonds, mortgages, or stocks) can only be sold at fire-sale prices that result in devastating losses. With few eager buyers, trying to escape illiquidity often brings on insolvency.

One common cause of banking crises, Reinhart and Rogoff report, is inflated home values, because housing loans often comprise a big share of banks' lending portfolios. Banking crises are less "the trigger of recession" than "an amplification mechanism" that worsens the downturn, they say. The adverse consequences are severe, the authors find. In advanced countries, housing prices drop 30% to 50%. Stock prices also fall on average about 50% from their peaks. (In the recent U.S. crisis, the immense wealth losses flowed mainly from the lower real estate and stock prices, not lost bank deposits that were mainly insured.) On average, unemployment rises seven percentage points from its low. There is a massive increase in government debt, mostly from a sharp drop in government tax revenues and increases in spending to cushion the downturn. Three years after the crisis, the growth in debt among advanced countries averaged 86%. (All these comparisons involve countries that have experienced post-World War II banking crises, though not all countries are in every comparison.)

A review of defaults on government debt (also called "sovereign debt") yields a picture only slightly brighter. Few major countries have never defaulted. England and later the United Kingdom did so at least eight times, from 1340 to 1932. France did nine times, starting in 1558; Spain six times, from 1557 to 1647. Latin American countries have been serial defaulters in both the 19th and 20th centuries. From 1985 to 1990, Brazil defaulted repeatedly; Venezuela seems the champion defaulter, having done so ten times since 1830. The United States doesn't escape. In 1790, it deferred some interest payments for a decade. States defaulted on bonds in two waves: one in the 1830s and 1840s, the other in the 1870s and 1880s. All told, Reinhart and Rogoff count 250 instances of default on external debt (money owed to foreigners) and 70 on domestic debt (money owed to a country's citizens). Many were overlapping. True, as they note, defaults by advanced countries have subsided since 1800. But the frequency of banking crises and their negative effects on government debt create the potential for future crises.

Books mentioned in this essay:

This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly, by Carmen M. Reinhart and Kenneth S. Rogoff. Princeton University Press, 496 pages, $35

Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises (5th Edition), by Charles P. Kindleberger and Robert Aliber. Wiley, 336 pages, $21.95

The Myth of the Rational Market: A History of Risk, Reward, and Delusion on Wall Street, by Justin Fox. HarperBusiness, 400 pages, $27.99

Slapped by the Invisible Hand: The Panic of 2007, by Gary B. Gorton. Oxford University Press, 240 pages, $34.95

In Fed We Trust: Ben Bernanke's War on the Great Panic, How the Federal Reserve Became the Fourth Branch of Government, by David Wessel. Crown Business, 336 pages, $26.99

Bloodletting

STUDYING THE PAST DOES NOT MAKE Reinhart and Rogoff optimistic: "the main message of this book [is that] we have been here before. The instruments of financial gain and loss have varied over the ages, as have the types of [financial] institutions.... Countries, institutions, and financial instruments may change across time, but human nature does not." Given the bleak historical record, questions arise: Why do financial systems function at all? What makes lenders and investors continue to stake their money when disaster may suddenly strike?

One reason is compulsion. Historically, the wealthy were often forced to lend to needy monarchs. French kings sometimes solved their inability to repay by beheading their creditors, a process popularly called "bloodletting." Compulsion hasn't disappeared. Economists call its modern version "financial repression," which means a systematic restricting of investment opportunities that forces people to put their money where government wants it. Reinhart and Rogoff write:

> In China and India today, most citizens are extremely limited as to the range of financial assets they are allowed to hold, with very low-interest bank accounts and cash essentially the only choices. With cash and jewelry at high risk of loss and theft and very few options for accumulating wealth to pay for retirement, healthcare, and children's education, citizens still put large sums in banks despite the artificially suppressed returns. In India, banks end up lending large amounts of their assets directly to the government, which thereby enjoys a far lower interest rate than it probably would in a liberalized capital market. In China, the money goes via directed lending to state-owned enterprises and infrastructure projects, again at far lower interest rates than would otherwise obtain.

Another obvious reason that financial markets survive is that over time much lending and investing is profitable. Though crises persist, they still occur only intermittently. Since 1800, banking crises have afflicted the United Kingdom only 9% of the time, France 12%, Sweden 5%, and the United States 13%, according to Reinhart and Rogoff's estimates. Considering the

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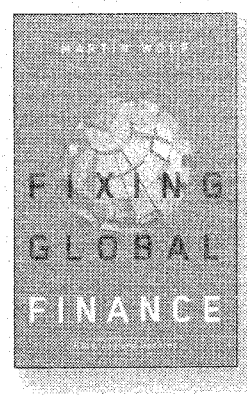

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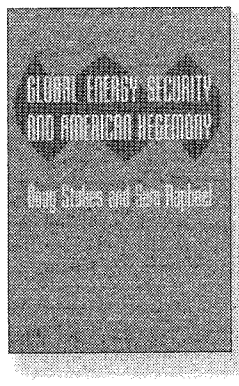

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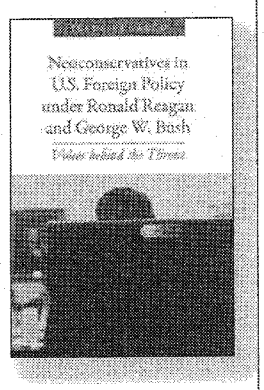

"Through extensive use of archival material, Velasco brings to light a number of facts that are not widely known, particularly with regard to the funding apparatus that financed the neocons' political and policy endeavors."

—Benjamin Ginsberg, Johns Hopkins University

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awful consequences, countries do have powerful reasons to avoid crises. In a 1981 paper, economists Jonathan Eaton and Mark Gersovitz argued that what historically limited governments from defaulting was worry about their "reputation" as reliable borrowers. Loans, usually in gold and silver coin, were often needed to fight wars or buy food to avert famine. Lenders were often foreign. The English and Spanish borrowed from Italian bankers. Similar considerations exist today. Countries often need to borrow to finance trade and investment, or cushion recessions. Finally, finance is profitable because riskier loans and investments carry higher rates to compensate for possible losses.

Costly Delusions

THE MAIN REASON THAT FINANCIAL CRISES recur, Reinhart and Rogoff argue, is not so much greed as wishful thinking and delusion. They quote a savvy Wall Street trader: "More money has been lost because of four words than at the point of a gun. Those words are, 'This time is different.'" Though that became their book's title and theme, Reinhart and Rogoff do not much illuminate why the delusion persists, except to attribute it to human nature. For a fuller explanation, it's worth revisiting the 1978 classic *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* by the late economic historian Charles Kindleberger. In it, he sets out a coherent framework for understanding financial booms and busts.

Relying heavily but not exclusively on the work of economist Hyman Minsky, Kindleberger described a financial cycle with three distinct phases. First came the "displacement": some new and arguably transformative development that excited economic spirits. It could be "the outbreak or end of a war, a bumper harvest or crop failure, the widespread adoption of an invention with pervasive effects—canals, railroads, the automobile—some political event or surprising financial success...." Regardless, it inspires confidence and creates new profit opportunities. Investment and production increase. The boom begins, usually fed by easier credit. In its early stages, all this may be well-grounded, a conventional response to new economic demands or sources of supply.

Next comes "euphoria," when people become intoxicated. "Positive feedback develops, as new investment leads to increases in income that stimulate further investment and further income increases," Kindleberger writes. At some point, these developments become detached from underlying economic realities and assume a life of their own. Speculation (what Adam Smith called "overtrading") gathers momentum. Investors increasingly buy for price appreciation of the asset, not the income it generates. The objects can be stocks, commodities (e.g., oil, gold, foodstuffs), real estate, tech start-up companies, currencies, or shopping malls. Prices spiral upwards as hardly anyone wants to be left behind in the rush to riches. Not surprisingly, the boom phase also invites fraud and criminality.

Finally comes what Kindleberger calls "revulsion," which can cause panic and a crash. Some event (a swindle revealed, a bank failure, a fall in prices, warnings by financial eminences) triggers a reappraisal. Prices begin to drop, and the declines accelerate as everyone sprints to the exit. The crash stops, Kindleberger contends, when

> one or more of three things happen: (1) prices fall so low that people are again tempted to move back into less liquid assets [that is, away from cash to stocks, real estate, and other assets that cannot be sold so easily]; (2) trade is cut off by setting limits on price declines, shutting down exchanges, or otherwise closing trading; or (3) a lender of last resort [the government or a central bank like the Fed] succeeds in convincing the market that money will be made available in sufficient volume to meet the demand for cash.

If the Kindleberger-Minsky model is correct—a good bet—then the ultimate villain in financial crises is the initial "displacement." As often as not, the displacement involves "innovation." In this context, the word does not merely mean some technical advance, say, the computer chip or fiber optics. It means more broadly any apparently novel set of circumstances or developments that convince people that "this time is different," because the economic terrain or conventional rules have fundamentally altered. What, then, was the "innovation" that started the cycle culminating in the 2007–09 crisis? There is already one popular candidate: a misguided faith in the "efficiency" of free markets that lulled investors into foolish bets and blinded government regulators to the gathering dangers.

Efficient Markets

FOR YEARS, THE BELIEF IN "EFFICIENT MARkets" reigned supreme among academic finance economists. By "efficient," they meant that the market—buying and selling—automatically processed all known information about stocks, so that the resulting prices correctly reflected a firm's present and future prospects, as best they could be known. Future price changes were a "random walk": they could not be predicted from past price movements. The "efficient market" hypothesis, associated closely with economist Eugene Fama of the University of Chicago, seemed supported

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by studies of stock prices. Although the "efficient market hypothesis" didn't explicitly reject the "manias" and "panics" that concerned Kindleberger, it did so implicitly. If "the market" quickly digested new information, then prices wouldn't dramatically diverge from underlying values. Eager sellers would quickly profit if prices seemed too high; rational buyers would do the same if prices seemed too low. Momentum trading and crowd psychology were discounted.

Although the efficient market hypothesis applied only to U.S. stocks, it conveyed a broader message: open financial markets are inherently rational. The implication was that "as more stocks, bonds, options, futures, and other financial instruments were created and traded, they would inevitably bring more rationality to economic activity. Financial markets possessed a wisdom that individuals, companies, and governments did not," as Justin Fox, a former columnist for *Time*, writes in *The Myth of the Rational Market: A History of Risk, Reward, and Delusion on Wall Street*. If this were so, then government regulation could be relaxed. Significantly, that comported with an anti-regulation ethos that began in the Reagan years. Regulators might police markets for fraud and compel more transparency in transactions. Aside from remedying abuses, these measures would improve market functioning by increasing the quality of information. But no one had to worry about titanic financial crises.

The triumph of these doctrines then set the stage for crisis, the argument goes. Motivated by compensation practices that rewarded short-term profits, Wall Street banks and investment banks created sophisticated and complex financial instruments—collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) and credit default swaps (CDSs), for instance—that could be sold and traded. To increase profits, these very same banks and investment banks used more and more borrowed money (i.e., "leverage") to conduct their trading and investing. With some exceptions, not including Fed chairmen Alan Greenspan and Ben Bernanke, government regulators were untroubled by these developments. So a mountain of risky securities grew atop an expanding foundation of short-term credit until the whole rickety structure collapsed in a manner that wouldn't have surprised Kindleberger.

The Great Reversal

This compact story transforms the financial crisis into a simple morality tale. Bad ideas ("efficient markets") led to bad policies (lax regulation) that led to bad outcomes. This seems persuasive, but it's exaggerated and misleading. For starters, it's hard to find

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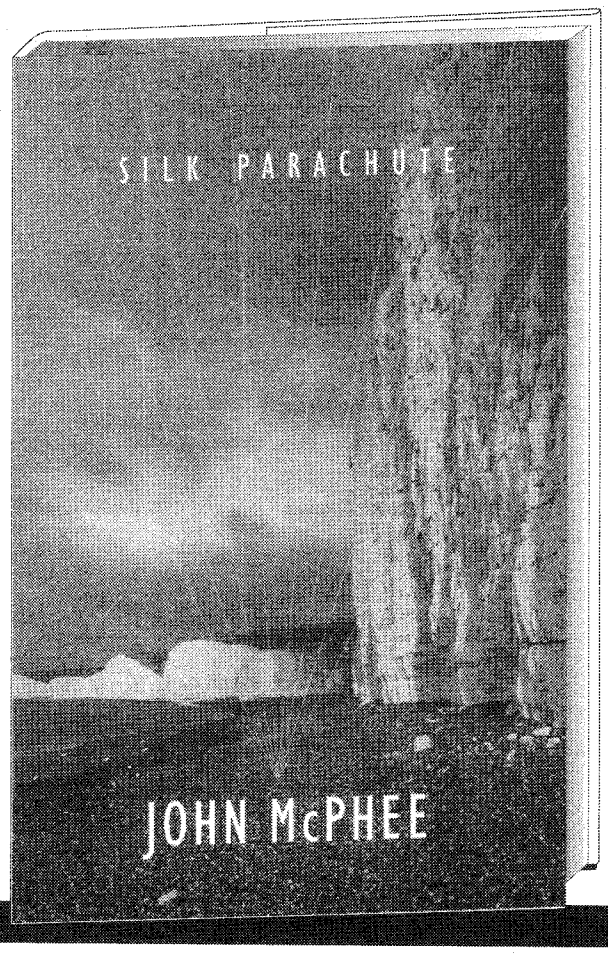

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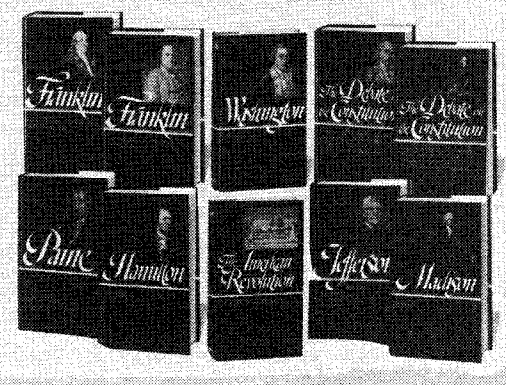

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top government policymakers who uncritically believed in "rational markets." Certainly, Greenspan and Bernanke didn't. Before the crisis, both gave speeches (Greenspan in August 2002 and Bernanke in October 2002) acknowledging the possibility of irrational bubbles. After the big "tech bubble" of the late 1990s, it was hard to argue otherwise. But both men cautioned against having the Fed "prick" the bubble before it popped on its own. It was hard to determine when rising asset prices constituted a bubble, they said. Trying to deflate it with higher interest rates and tighter credit might do more harm than good for employment and output. The Fed could limit the damage once the bubble had burst, they argued.

The truth was that the "efficient markets hypothesis" was mainly an academic preoccupation. As Fox writes: "For all the success that the new ideas about efficient markets achieved on campus and within certain precincts of the investing world, they had yet to penetrate the real centers of economic power in America by the early 1980s." Indeed, it's hard to tell when they did penetrate. By the late '80s, the theory itself was increasingly under assault from scholars and real world developments. "Behavioral" economists found quirks in investor psychology that confounded pure rationality. Many investors, for example, feared losses more than they prized gains; their risk-taking was skewed. Worse, the stock market crash of 1987, when prices dropped more than 20% in a single day, hardly seemed rational. Economist William Sharpe, a leading figure in the efficient market school, pronounced the collapse "pretty weird" to the *Wall Street Journal* and soon heard from his mother: "Fifteen years of education, three advanced degrees, and all you can say is 'it's weird.'"

The actual origins of the financial crisis are more obscure and disturbing than efficient market ideas and their alleged policy offspring. The defining economic event of the 1980s and for many years thereafter was the decline of double-digit inflation (from about 13% in 1979 to 4% by 1983), which unleashed a quarter-century economic boom. Inflation's suppression resulted from an unspoken alliance between then-Fed chairman Paul Volcker and newly-elected Ronald Reagan, who supported Volcker's high interest rates and tolerated the resulting harsh recession (peak monthly unemployment: 10.8%). The purging of inflationary expectations, in Kindleberger's terminology, was the initial "displacement." It created new profit opportunities and changed the way people thought and acted.

Contrasts between "before" and "after" Volcker-Reagan were stark. Before, government had aggressively tried to manage the economy to eliminate recessions, with progressively worse results—not only rising inflation but also four recessions in a row (1969, 1973–75, 1980, and 1981–82). After, government was less activist, and the economy improved. There were only two relatively mild recessions in the next quarter-century (those of 1990–91 and 2001). Average unemployment was much lower; the monthly maximum was 7.8%. The drop in interest rates, crudely reflecting inflation's decline, boosted both stock and housing prices. Before, the stock market had stagnated: it was about the same in 1982 as in 1965. After, it soared: in 1999, it was almost 12 times higher than in 1982. Housing prices followed a similar, if less steep, upward trajectory. The median sales prices of existing homes nearly tripled from 1982 to 2007.

People took note. The lessons of this great reversal slowly seeped into popular and expert consciousness. Assumptions shifted; beliefs changed. Government economic management, it seemed, succeeded more by doing less. The "activist" polices of the 1960s and '70s had been mistaken. Left largely alone, financial markets mostly trended upward, as did home prices.

> So the central question remains: can we harness finance for good without suffering from its periodic crashes?

Markets seemed largely self-correcting. When they went to excess, the Fed could cushion the effects by alertly easing credit conditions. The 1987 stock market crash hadn't caused a deep recession. Neither had the wildly inflated stock and tech bubbles of the late '90s. The acclaim for Greenspan reflected his (and the Fed's) apparent ability to prevent savage instability.

It was these actual experiences that conditioned behavior and shaped thinking, not devotion to the academic belief in efficient markets. If the theory attained some popular prominence, it did so only as one way of explaining improved U.S. economic performance. But it was the performance, not the theory, that mattered most. If the economic instability of the 1970s had persisted, few would have paid attention to the theory, which would have seemed unrelated to everyday reality. Greenspan and Bernanke's ideas seemed at most a pragmatic version of efficient markets. Financial markets policed themselves most of the time. But they could get out of whack. They were good but not perfect.

Logic to the Madness

On balance, the economic world seemed less risky. Economists talked about the Great Moderation: benevolent business cycles characterized by long expansions and infrequent, brief recessions. Financial markets for stocks, bonds, and currencies had become less volatile by 2003 and 2004; routine market swings were smaller. Good. The trouble was that all these favorable developments ultimately backfired. They rationalized self-defeating behavior.

If the economy was less risky, then practices and government policies that had once seemed dangerous or imprudent were less so. Investors and households alike could take on more "leverage"—borrow more—because the threats to repayment (deep recessions, big unpredicted drops in financial markets) had lessened. Lending standards could be relaxed for the same reasons. With rising asset prices (stocks, homes), households could save less and spend more because their wealth was constantly ascending. Thus, the gains from a less inflationary economy were squandered by the false security they inspired.

In its details, the financial crisis of 2007–09 was highly complicated, featuring many obscure financial instruments and institutions. But in its essentials, the crisis was fairly simple, as Yale University economist Gary Gorton shows in *Slapped by the Invisible Hand: the Panic of 2007*. It resembled an old-fashioned bank panic, with the names and identities of the players changed. In a traditional panic, something—a bank or corporate failure, news of loan losses—frightens depositors about the safety of their accounts. People then assault not just one bank but many banks, demanding their money, because no one knows which banks have suffered losses and which haven't. It was this typical "retail" panic that government deposit insurance had effectively outlawed by assuring ordinary savers that, even if a bank failed, they'd get their money back.

By contrast, the 2007–09 crisis was a "wholesale" panic, Gorton writes. The "depositors" were not individuals but insurance companies, pension funds, and other "institutional investors." They didn't make deposits but provided funds through the "repo market." "Repo" is short-hand for "repurchase agreement." Under a repurchase agreement, the lender advances money to the borrower, which provides collateral in the form of securities (U.S. Treasury securities or some other); the borrower repays the loan in a short period, usually a day to several months, and thereby "repurchases" its collateral. By 2007, the "repo" market may have grown to $10 trillion, and many banks and investment banks depended heavily on it for funds. But then

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it imploded, as lenders began to doubt the value of mortgage-backed securities being posted as collateral. Panic ensued because no one knew which financial institutions held the most "toxic" securities, Gorton argues. So lenders withdrew credit from all.

With hindsight, many home loans packaged into those mortgage-backed securities seem absurd. Borrowers had weak credit histories—documentation of their incomes was sometimes missing—and after low "teaser" rates for two or three years, loan rates would rise to clearly unaffordable levels. But there was a logic to this madness, and it derived from the heady, post-inflationary era. Home prices had consistently appreciated—and, it was argued, would continue appreciating. If so, borrowers could refinance their loans after two or three years at lower rates, because their homes would be worth more and loans would be safer to lenders. Even if borrowers defaulted, lenders could more easily recover their funds. This beguiling logic rationalized more lending, which sent housing prices up, which rationalized more lending—until the bubble burst. The whole cycle originated in the disinflationary decline of interest rates that propelled the initial surge in home prices.

We all know the denouement. Excessive lending had also occurred elsewhere: in commercial real estate, car loans, and "private equity." As doubts mounted about financial institutions' health, their lenders retreated and redirected funds into "safe" U.S. Treasury securities. The Federal Reserve and Treasury, having underestimated the crisis for months, rushed to fill the void after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. Again, the details of different loan programs were highly technical and baffling. But their basic purpose was plain: to substitute government credit, albeit temporary, for vanishing private credit and to do "whatever it takes"—in David Wessel's evocative phrase—to avoid another Great Depression. As Wessel shows in *In Fed We Trust: Ben Bernanke's War on the Great Panic, How the Federal Reserve Became the Fourth Branch of Government*, the response was big enough to restore confidence by demonstrating that money markets would continue to function.

So the central question remains: can we harness finance for good without suffering from its periodic crashes?

Systemic Risk

On paper, the answer would seem to be "yes." In the wake of crisis, both Greenspan and Bernanke confessed that their trust in the self-regulation of financial markets, though qualified, was still overdone. The road to redemption, then, would seem clear: revert to a more tightly regulated financial system, more resembling what existed from World War II to the early 1980s. The general idea is that if government ultimately stands behind the financial system, then it must police risk-taking to preempt "systemic failures." In this spirit, the Obama Administration has made a series of proposals: tougher capital requirements for banks, greater regulation of "derivatives" such as credit default swaps, tighter supervision of any financial institution deemed "too big to fail," a way to shut such institutions gracefully without duplicating the chaos of the Lehman bankruptcy, and a consumer finance agency to prevent abusive practices.

If adopted, some of these proposals (versions of which Congress debated as this essay was written) might improve financial safeguards. But one should be cautious. It's impossible to restore the early post-World War II financial system, and it's easy to exaggerate its virtues. At the end of World War II, commercial banks and savings and loan associations ("thrifts")—both heavily regulated—preformed about three quarters of financial intermediation between savers and spenders. Now their role is about two fifths. Other channels (commercial paper, bonds, private equity, hedge funds) have flourished. In addition, there are now gigantic international flows of money that didn't exist in earlier decades. Banks in Europe can imperil banks in the United States—and vice versa. Regulation is harder, because the geography of finance is more intricate and more global.

Nor was the earlier system as sturdy as it seems in hindsight. By the 1980s, it was beginning to wobble. Not only was there the savings-and-loan crisis, as high inflation made many older, low-yielding home mortgages unprofitable, but commercial banks also suffered large losses on loans to Latin American developing countries, for commercial real estate and for oil and natural gas projects. Government regulators didn't prevent these problems—a conclusion that reinforces the limited role of "deregulation" in explaining the recent crisis. The problem was not deregulation, because banks and much of the housing finance system—at the heart of the crisis—remained heavily regulated. The problem was that the regulators, like the bankers and brokers they supervised, succumbed to over-optimism. They overlooked or even encouraged relaxed lending standards.

Here is the difficulty. Policing for mistakes or recklessness at individual financial institutions is one thing. Policing for "systemic risk"—trends that jeopardize the entire financial superstructure—is quite another. Most bubbles do not trigger full-blown crises. They merely deflate and inflict losses. If markets are to function, this process must occur. Otherwise, investors and traders, believing themselves increasingly protected from losses, will undertake ever greater risks. But when does normal market functioning become a systemic threat? It isn't easy to tell. Even in mid-2008, when the crisis was unfolding and had already taken several unexpected turns, government officials and private bankers underestimated its potential fury. They suffered a collective failure of imagination. They didn't envision the chain reaction that would nearly devastate the system.

What this crisis demonstrated is that government officials and private bankers, traders, and investors are likely to share similar beliefs about how the system operates. After all, they've lived through the same experiences. The capacity for delusion persists, because although financial crises repeat an age-old cycle, as Kindleberger observed, the details differ. The housing bubble and the preceding tech bubble were not identical twins. So it is always possible to find new reasons why unsustainable trends can be sustained. The next crisis won't be like the last and, conceivably, might involve government debt of wealthy countries. Since World War II, no major advanced nation has defaulted on its official debt, and the notion that one or more might do so has long been considered unthinkable. That faith has justified a permissive attitude towards borrowing, which has resulted in high debt levels that now are rising rapidly. But the unthinkable can't happen, because this time is different.

Robert J. Samuelson, a columnist for Newsweek *and the* Washington Post, *is the author of* The Great Inflation and Its Aftermath: the Past and Future of American Affluence *(Random House), which has just been reissued in paperback.*

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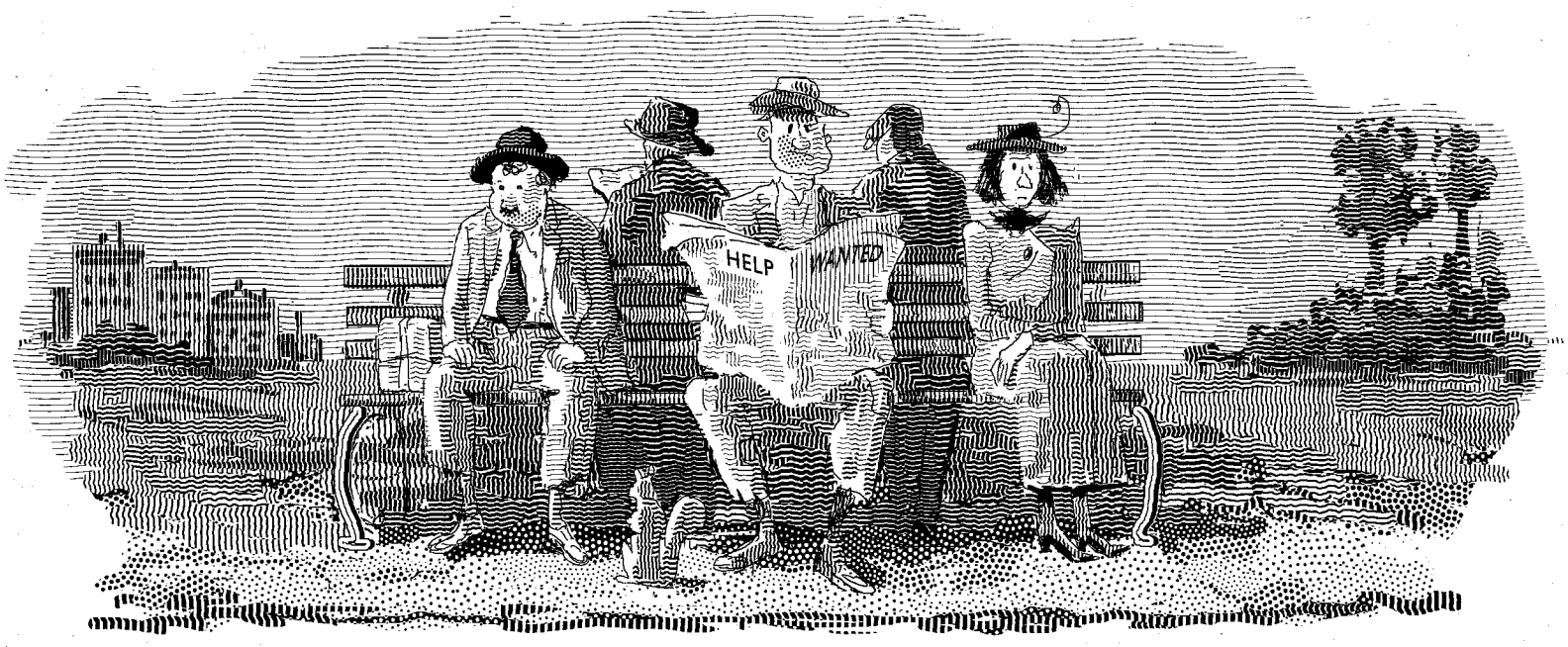
Essay by Richard Vedder

Explaining the Great Depression



No economic event in the 20th century had a greater impact on people and institutions than the Great Depression, which arguably was responsible for the ascension of Adolf Hitler (and, by extension, World War II and the Holocaust), the rise of the modern welfare state, and a revolution in the way scholars understand the economy.

Why did the Great Depression occur? Why did it last so long? Why did some countries have a much milder and shorter downturn than others? Are there lessons to be learned from the Depression that apply to similar downturns, like the one we are in now?

The scholarly evidence, once seemingly supportive of activist governmental fiscal and monetary policies, has increasingly shown that Depression-era governmental activism likely prolonged (and perhaps even caused) the downturn. Thus an objective reading of the Depression story makes one decidedly pessimistic that President Obama's policies of massive budget deficits, stimulus packages, huge interventions in financial markets, and major structural changes in the economy (via health care reform and so-called cap and trade bills) will have positive effects on the economy in years ahead. Parallels between Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the Obama Administration's agenda are often uncanny: in 1933, government officials promoted the killing of six million pigs to help agriculture; in 2009, the Obama administration promoted the "killing" of 250,000 older automobiles (Cash for Clunkers) to help the auto industry.

In this connection, it is instructive to compare the 1920–22 downturn with the one beginning in 1929. For the first seven quarters, the 1920–22 cyclical decline was by most measures slightly *more* severe than the one beginning in late 1929. Yet the earlier downturn elicited little government action: President Woodrow Wilson was too incapacitated by a stroke to manage major policy innovations. Warren G. Harding, who assumed office in March 1921, was opposed to intervention, and aided by conservative Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, he cut government spending and returned the government to a healthy budget surplus. Within a year or so, the economy was rebounding. By contrast, in the 1929 downturn, the federal government tried to manipulate wages upward, enacted the highest tariff in American history, and undertook huge public works projects, major new social programs (e.g., Social Security), and comprehensive regulation of wages, prices, and working conditions (the National Industrial Recovery Act). Yet the unemployment rate exceeded 10% for a decade. The non-activist policy response of 1920–22 was decidedly more effective than the activist one of 1929–30.

Scholarly attitudes towards the Depression have gone through three distinct phases: Neoclassical/Austrian (1929–1935), Keynesian (1936–70), and Post-Keynesian (1970 to the present).

Pre-Depression Orthodoxy

Before the Depression, there was surprisingly little discussion about business cycles and their cure. The word "unemployment" did not even exist until the 1880s. At the time of the Great Depression, English-speaking economists were heavily influenced by the work of Alfred Marshall (1842–1924), whose most prominent disciple was probably A.C. Pigou (1877–1959). Pigou's *Industrial Fluctuations* (1927) and *The Theory of Unemployment* (1933) summed up the neoclassical perspective: by definition, unemployment occurred when the quantity of labor supplied exceeded the quantity demanded, which occurred when wage rates were too high to fully employ workers (even allowing for unemployment short in duration or resulting from people changing jobs).

The most famous American economist at the time, Irving Fisher, was interested in monetary phenomena with implications for business cycles, but he did not emphasize those cycles in his work and erred famously when he opined in the fall of 1929 that the "stock market has reached…a permanently high plateau."

In his classic works *Theory of Money and Credit* (first published in German in 1912) and *Human Action* (1949), the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises argued that downturns reflected distortions in prices (especially interest rates) from their natural rate, and that governmental manipulation of the money supply or use of fiscal policy stimulus was counterproductive. His brilliant disciple Friedrich Hayek extended Mises's insights in such works as *Monetary Theory and the Trade Cycle* (1929) and *Prices and Production* (1931). In the Mises-Hayek interpretation, as later articulated by Murray Rothbard, the Federal Reserve, in its first peacetime exercise of power, expanded the credit supply excessively in the mid- to late

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1920s, pushing interest rates below the rate of interest that would have emerged naturally from individual tradeoffs between saving and consumption. This led to "malinvestment" in the form of a housing and consumer durable goods boom that was ultimately not sustainable and led to the stock market crash in '29. Consistent with the Austrian view that price distortions induced by the central bank caused the depression, Hayek's London School of Economics colleague Lionel Robbins wrote an early critique, *The Great Depression* (1934), in which he argued that abnormally high wages contributed to the downturn.

Even after Keynesian economics reigned supreme, market-oriented economists continued to make their case, as in Benjamin Anderson's *Economics and the Public Welfare* (1949), W.H. Hutt's *The Theory of Idle Resources* (1939), and Murray Rothbard's *America's Great Depression* (1963).

Keynes and Keynesianism

In 1936, the early neoclassical/Austrian perspective was swept away by the publication of John Maynard Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, the most influential work in economics in the 20th century. Keynes argued that insufficient aggregate demand (underspending), rather than high wages or distorting central bank policies caused major downturns, especially the Great Depression. Keynes was brilliant, persuasive, and a master of what Deirdre McCloskey calls "the rhetoric of economics," which so often triumphs over either dispassionate empirical evidence or superior theoretical frameworks.

Keynes popularized what became known as the "multiplier" effect (an increase in government spending will lead to a larger increase in national income) and the "paradox of thrift" (too much saving will lower aggregate demand, national income, and, thereby, the amount of savings). Keynes's young disciple Paul Samuelson added the "accelerator principle," showing how small changes in investment spending can have magnified effects. Keynes's work was in some sense anticipated in the 1920s by the English economist John Hobson and American writers W.T. Foster and Waddill Catchings, but Keynes's theory was far more comprehensive and seemed to explain the problems of the time.

A Keynesian explanation of the Great Depression starts by observing that an increasingly unequal distribution of income in the 1920s led to rising savings—mainly among the affluent—that were invested in the stock market and produced a consequent decline in spending on consumer durable goods and housing. The stock market, over-valued because of speculation fueled by massive investments by wealthy Americans and loans from banks, started plummeting in the fall of 1929. As stock prices fell, panic ensued. Consumers drastically cut spending and, perhaps more important, businesses sharply reduced investment. The Hoover Administration, and later the Roosevelt Administration, failed to follow a vigorous fiscal policy of deficit financing that could have stimulated aggregate demand. Although some New Deal efforts—e.g., the Works Progress Administration—were, on balance, job creating, they were financed by higher taxes, or counteracted by budget surpluses of state and local governments. When the United States entered World War II and truly massive deficit-financed government spending was finally undertaken, however, unemployment plunged and the Depression ended.

Keynes died in 1946, but others expanded on his ideas. Alvin Hansen wrote of "secular stagnation"—how the close of the frontier and slowing of population growth led to a fall in American economic growth. Abba Lerner looked at the policy implications of Keynes's work, stressing the idea of "functional finance"—using budget deficits as a tool to achieve economic stabilization. Lawrence Klein's *Keynesian Revolution* (1947) influenced a generation of graduate students. Samuelson brought Keynesian ideas to generations of undergraduate American college students through his textbook, *Economics* (first published, 1948), widely imitated by other economists.

Keynes's work, however, was more of a theoretical treatise than an explicit explanation of the Depression. Empirical support for his ideas was surprisingly skimpy. E. Cary Brown authored an influential 1956 *American Economic Review* paper arguing that expansionary Keynesian-style fiscal policy was essentially not used in the 1930s—hence the downturn's length and severity. John Kenneth Galbraith popularized Keynesian ideas with books like *The Great Crash, 1929* (1954), which were long on anecdotes but short on empirical evidence. Major biographies of FDR, such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr's, *The Age of Roosevelt* (1957–60) and James MacGregor Burns's *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (1956) implied that activist government policies alleviated both the downturn and human distress. Later, Peter Temin used more serious empirical evidence in *Did Monetary Forces Cause the Great Depression?* (1976) to suggest that aggregate demand did in fact plummet (mainly because of declining consumption and exports), that monetary policy was ineffective, and, by implication, that aggressive Keynesian-style fiscal stimulus could have ameliorated the 1929 downturn.

Rise of the Monetarists

The Keynesian explanation of the depression, however, began to fade—very slowly in the late 1960s and early '70s, but faster after vigorous Keynesian-style deficit spending failed to prevent the stagflation of the 1970s. The key work igniting the post-Keynesian interpretation was Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz's magisterial *A Monetary History of the United States* (1963). The authors revived Irving Fisher's quantity theory of money, the intuitively compelling notion that changes in price levels have to do with changes in the amount of money in circulation. Friedman and Schwartz demonstrated, too, how changes in the stock of money are closely associated with boom and bust cycles, and that the Great Depression's chief cause was the Federal Reserve's failure to prevent a roughly one-third decline in the money stock between 1929 and 1933. At the onset of the Great Depression, the Fed did not serve as a "lender of last resort," and instead let thousands of banks fail. It made very bad decisions, like raising the discount rate in 1933 when unemployment exceeded 25% (making it more costly for banks to borrow from the Fed and thus restricting credit), because of a fear of capital flowing abroad. Within a month President Roosevelt had to close all the banks to prevent systemic breakdown. The Fed had done too little too late.

Contrary to the Austrian and other early interpretations, Friedman and Schwartz thought the problem was poor stewardship of price stability by the central bank, rather than distortions in relative prices (including interest rates). The Keynesian framework, however, was well entrenched in the economics profession, and was enhanced by the work of an obscure New Zealand economist, William Phillips, whose "Phillips Curve"—christened in 1958 and partly redefined later by Robert Solow and Paul Samuelson—suggested that increases in prices (presumably induced by fiscal or monetary stimulus) were associated with falling unemployment. During the early 1930s, prices fell and unemployment rose, consistent with the Phillips curve. The Keynesian solution would be to inflate the economy—mostly by more government borrowing and spending (since monetary policy was considered ineffective), raising aggregate demand and thus prices, and consequently reducing unemployment.

Friedman was hostile to this formulation. In 1967, in his presidential address to the American Economic Association, he outlined what became known as the "natural rate" thesis. Unemployment has some "natural" rate that prevails when actual and expected inflation rates are the same. Deviations of inflation from the

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expected rate are responsible for a good deal of fluctuations in unemployment and output. In the long run, you cannot fool all the people all of the time—their expectations change in a way that renders stimulus policies ineffective, and thus inflationary spending loses its potency. Edmund Phelps reinforced and augmented this view in his important book, *Microeconomic Foundations of Employment and Inflation Theory* (1970).

Robert Lucas, Thomas Sargent, and others morphed the Friedman-Phelps view into an even more radical form of economic theorizing: "rational expectations" or New Classical economics. In its extreme form, the theory suggests that any policy action of the government (e.g., Keynesian-style fiscal policy) will be completely and almost immediately offset by the behavioral changes of individuals who might be adversely affected by the policy change. Although this theory in itself did little to explain the Great Depression, it increased skepticism towards the mid-century Keynesian view that the Depression reflected under-spending by consumers and investors that could have been mitigated by prompt, aggressive policy.

Against the Keynesians

The pre- and post-Keynesian skeptics have received considerable support in recent decades. My book with Lowell Gallaway, *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America* (first published, 1993; updated and expanded, 1997) argued that unemployment in the 20th century was inversely related to the "adjusted real wage," i.e., wages adjusted for inflation and productivity change. In our view, the Great Depression resulted largely from Herbert Hoover's and FDR's poorly conceived but successful effort to keep businesses from reducing wages—through such wage-enhancing policies as the Smoot-Hawley Tariff in 1930, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in 1933, and the Wagner Act in 1935. Indeed, the banking crisis after 1930, in our view, reflected deterioration in bank balance sheets and a resulting loss of confidence that originated in the adverse financial consequences of Hoover's high wage policy. Some research by Ben Bernanke published in his *Essays on the Great Depression* (2000) is consistent with this hypothesis. Other work, notably William Barber's *From New Era to New Deal* (1989), clearly documents Hoover's obsession with promoting high wages as a solution to insufficient aggregate demand. Yet not all scholars agree: Bernanke argued that "maybe Herbert Hoover and Henry Ford were right; higher real wages may have paid for themselves in...that their... effect on aggregate demand compensated for their tendency to raise costs."

The Vedder-Gallaway view has been reinforced by Harold Cole and Lee Ohanian's important 2004 article in the *Journal of Political Economy*, "New Deal Policies and the Persistence of the Great Depression: A General Equilibrium Analysis," which demonstrates that wages and prices were grossly distorted upward by the NIRA's perverse effects. The Depression could have ended seven years earlier in the authors' judgment. Ohanian has more recently reinforced the Vedder-Gallaway position that high wages induced by government policy under Hoover dramatically increased the scale of the downturn.

The attack on Keynesian conventional wisdom has come from several other quarters as well. For example, Robert Higgs has emphasized

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something contemporary observers of the New Deal spoke about often: American businessmen for the most part loathed and feared Franklin Roosevelt's fiery anti-business speeches, high taxes on incomes and profits, and stringent regulations. This "regime uncertainty" dramatically reduced investment spending, an issue Michael Bernstein explored in *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America 1929–1939* (1987). The fall in confidence that some Keynesians believe was important in explaining the post-1929 decline may, in fact, be a better explanation of the downturn's long *duration*, and was due more to a lack of confidence brought on by fear of government than anything endemic to the market-based financial system.

Several other interpretations of the Depression have likewise been far more critical of Hoover and Roosevelt than was typical in the era of Keynesian ascendancy. Gene Smiley's short, trenchant critique, *Rethinking the Great Depression* (2002), highlighted policy failures ranging from the Smoot-Hawley tariff and "soak the rich" tax increases to everyone's favorite target, the NIRA. Most recently, Amity Shlaes's *The Forgotten Man* (2008) cleverly used vignettes from the lives of Depression-era men and women to show some of the New Deal's negative consequences. In general, presidential biographers have grown more critical of New Deal policies over the years, a judgment almost certainly to be manifested in Alonzo Hamby's forthcoming biography of FDR.

International Factors

TO BE SURE, SUPPORTERS OF THE TRADITIONAL Keynesian interpretation still exist. The indefatigable Peter Temin continues to write treatises such as *Lessons from the Great Depression* (1989), stressing aggregate demand explanations, and emphasizing international dimensions of the crisis. Not surprisingly, Hoover himself thought external forces were responsible for the downturn.

Temin's emphasis on international factors is not unique. In *Golden Fetters: the Gold Standard and the Great Depression* (1992), Barry Eichengreen has written extensively on the gold standard's allegedly perverse role in creating and maintaining a worldwide depression. Eichengreen extends the internationalist explanation offered by Charles Kindleberger in *The World in Depression* (1973). These writers generally accept a Keynesian framework, arguing that the gold standard prevented activist fiscal and monetary stimulus that could have moderated decline.

Under a gold standard, nations were obligated to redeem their currency with gold. If a nation imported more than it exported, or massively invested abroad, it would typically be forced to use gold to help pay for those goods or investments. As gold stocks became small, nations wanting to remain on the gold standard would have to make imports less attractive, typically by lowering domestic prices (usually through restrictive monetary and fiscal policies). Thus a nation's ability to engage in monetary and fiscal stimulus—much loved by Keynesians—was severely restricted. Using Phillips Curve-like reasoning, it was argued that deflationary policies implemented to defend the currency under the gold standard contributed to the deflation that led to rising unemployment.

Tariffs and protectionism had international repercussions, too. Economists of all stripes have derided international trade's precipitous decline during the Depression—with over a thousand

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economists denouncing Smoot-Hawley at the time—and continue to regard that decline as at least a secondary cause of the downturn. Retaliatory action by other nations added to the policy-induced fall in international trade. Some writers attribute spillover effects from European financial crises (e.g., the failure of Austria's Credit-Anstalt Bank in 1931) as contributing factors in the near collapse of the U.S. financial system.

The Keynesian approach received an important boost in 2008 in the *American Economic Review*, where Gauti Eggertsson argued that "regime change" by Franklin Roosevelt's inflationary monetary policy and fiscal stimulus served to bring about recovery from 1933 to 1937. My guess is that Eggertsson's paper will prompt many skeptical scholars to question whether meaningful recovery occurred and, even if it did, whether FDR's activist policies were responsible.

Policy Analysis

Much of the criticism of 1930s government activism is at the micro level, in the form of detailed studies of specific policies. Of particular interest is the research into the National Industrial Recovery Act, which received at best only mixed reviews even in early, favorable accounts. The legislation did two important things: First, it created a Public Works Administration (PWA) that in 1935 morphed into the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Second, it attempted to raise prices to return firms to profitability, and—contradictorily—it tried to raise wages to stimulate aggregate demand. In the midst of more than 20% unemployment, wages soared in the last half of 1933 as firms displaying the "Blue Eagle" (and thus eligible to participate in the price-fixing cartel) were required to meet minimum wage standards that were high for the time.

The NIRA's public works proceeded from the same rationale as President Obama's 2009 stimulus package. The 1930s experience is instructive. At its peak in March 1939, the WPA employed 3,000,000 workers (equivalent to ten million in today's larger labor force), but the unemployment rate using standard Bureau of Labor Statistics definitions was still estimated to be an extraordinary 19.3%. This was nearly six years after the NIRA's passage, and after unemployment in much of Europe had fallen back to pre-Depression levels, despite relatively less frenzied governmental action (for example, British unemployment in 1938 stood at 13.3%, compared with 22.5% in 1931 and 11% in 1929). For every job allegedly created by PWA/WPA, part or all of another job was lost from the indirect effects of the legislation, including the higher taxes called for to support such programs: the highest marginal federal income tax rate rose from 24% in 1929 to 79% by 1936.

Moreover, studies beginning with Gavin Wright's "The Political Economy of New Deal Spending: An Econometric Analysis" in the February 1974 *Review of Economics and Statistics* demonstrated that New Deal "stimulus" largesse was distributed with political considerations foremost in mind. Some poor, reliably Democratic areas in the South received less than relatively well-to-do swing states that the Roosevelt Administration wanted to win over. A comprehensive study in 2003 by Price Fishback, Shawn Kantor, and John Wallis concluded, "For all programs, spending for political advantage in upcoming elections was a significant factor." It is hard to believe that the Obama Administration learned the economic lessons from the New Deal's stimulus efforts but failed to learn the political ones.

This *tour de horizon* is necessarily abbreviated, neglecting leading scholars writing about various aspects of the Depression. Nor have I touched on the often unintended effects of the New Deal on specific groups of people. One example worth citing: David Bernstein's *Only One Place of Redress* (2001) shows that New Deal labor laws and court decisions often had disproportionately bad effects on African-Americans, thwarting the beginnings of their progress in obtaining relatively well-paying and skilled jobs.

Forgotten Lessons

The Great Depression has become the leading academic battleground for alternative perspectives on economic stabilization. Careers are often solidified by Depression-era research. Had Ben Bernanke not done lots of research on the Depression, would he be Federal Reserve Chairman today? I doubt it. Thus academic scholarship on one economic crisis has produced a major actor concerned with the resolution of another one. Academics thrive and prosper from their disagreements, so it is unlikely that a universally accepted explanation of the Depression will ever evolve from the assorted and often contradictory views of contemporary scholars.

Nevertheless, the once popular notion that the Great Depression is a frightening object lesson in the fragility of markets and the failings of free enterprise has receded considerably, and the alternative notion that mistaken or misbegotten government (including Federal Reserve) policies prolonged and deepened the misery has grown in importance. Unfortunately, however, it seems in an age largely ignorant of the past, every couple of generations we have to relearn the forgotten lessons of earlier times. The tragedy of current federal activism in the name of economic recovery is that our nation's leaders have either forgotten, or ignored, the accumulating evidence that government efforts to heal sick economies are usually failures.

Richard Vedder is Distinguished Professor of Economics at Ohio University and an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

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Book Review by Darius Udrys

Pure Son of Liberty

The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution, by Alex Storozynski.
Thomas Dunne Books, 384 pages, $29.95

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its native son, Thaddeus Kosciuszko, are little known today among American students of politics and history. But America's founders studied the one, alongside other examples of republican government, and they knew personally the other as a comrade in arms in the American Revolution. A new biography by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Alex Storozynski—*The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution*—shines some deserved light on both.

As one of Europe's home-grown experiments in ordered liberty, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was neither a great success nor an abject failure. Established in 1569, it survived more than two centuries surrounded by meddling and belligerent neighbors—no mean feat, as republics go. In his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, written at the request of a reform-minded nobleman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau recognized its weaknesses. Yet he marveled both at the republic's longevity and vitality, and at the devotion of its nobles to their freedoms. He cautioned would-be reformers: "in thinking what you wish to gain, do not forget what you may lose." What they hoped to gain was a respite from anarchy and foreign interference that plagued the republic. What they stood to lose, according to Rousseau, was their liberty and the constitution that "has made you what you are."

At the height of its power in the 15th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Union (the alliance that preceded the Commonwealth) was unrivalled in Europe. Its lands extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Under the last king of the ruling dynasty, a federal republic was established, united under an elected monarchy with a parliament of elected representatives of the nobility. *Rex regnat et non gubernat* ("the King reigns but does not govern") was the guiding principle of the regime, according to Jan Zamoyski, a contemporary advisor to several kings.

The assertive nobility secured an expansive array of liberties for itself that were reaffirmed by each successive monarch prior to coronation. Rousseau credits this process with preventing the slide toward despotism manifested by other European powers. Nonetheless, by the 18th century it was widely recognized that the traditional rights of the gentry in this "noble's democracy" (the nobility constituted about 8% of the population—a remarkably broad franchise for the time) were being exploited by neighboring powers to paralyze the state.

"Too much liberty, not enough order" was a popular way of expressing the problem—an assessment shared by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, who mention the Commonwealth in *The Federalist*. To them it was an example of a confederation "unfit for self-government and self-defense" due to its lack of a consolidated central government able to regulate relations between "local sovereigns." Madison called it "a mixture of aristocracy and of monarchy in their worst forms" and lamented that it had been "dignified" with the name of a republic.

Despite (some say, because of) reforms that, in 1791, produced Europe's first written constitution, the Commonwealth was ultimately subjugated and trisected by neighboring Austria, Prussia, and Russia. But not without a fight—a fight in which Kosciuszko played a heroic role, evincing the dedication to liberty that he had already shown in the American cause. Storozynski's book brings to life the struggle for freedom on two continents as experienced by this Lithuanian-Polish warrior and patriot. (Usually identified as a Pole, Kosciuszko was of Lithuanian and Ruthenian descent; his family's estate was in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.)

Kosciuszko trained at the Royal Military Academy in Warsaw. Barred as a foreigner from enrollment in French military academies, he studied military engineering privately in Paris. As a boy he had absorbed the curriculum taught by the Piarist Fathers, including lessons on John Locke and the classics which, according to Storozynski, were particularly influential in shaping his views. He had witnessed the oppression of serfs in his native Lithuania and had personally experienced the stigma of social inequality. Fleeing threats from a magnate who refused to let his daughter marry a low noble like Kosciuszko, he left Lithuania in 1775. Hearing of the rebellion of the American colonies, he was eager to test his military skills serving the ideals that had inspired it.

Kosciuszko's arrival in North America in the summer of 1776 was fittingly dramatic. His ship was smashed on the reefs off the coast of Martinique, and he had to swim to shore clutching the ship's mast. Making his way to Philadelphia, the young officer presented himself to Benjamin Franklin, who enlisted his engineering skills in developing defenses for the city. From there, he went on to play a key part at several important moments in the Revolutionary War—deploying effective diversionary tactics during the Northern Army's retreat from Ticonderoga, playing a pivotal role in drafting battle plans that led to victory at Saratoga, and designing the fortress at West Point.

Washington certainly came to know and appreciate the man (honoring his name with eleven different spellings in his correspondence: "Kosciouski," "Kosciousko," "Kosiusko," "Cosciusko," etc.). Toward the end of the war, en route to the Southern Army to which Washington had assigned him, Kosciuszko met Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson. Storozynski recounts Kosciuszko's surprise when he learned "that the man who wrote that 'all men are created equal' owned slaves." The two became friends, and Kosciuszko pressed Jefferson to allow him to use his earnings from service in the Revolutionary War to buy, free, and educate Jefferson's slaves. But on this matter Jefferson proved evasive and, in the end, unwilling to indulge Kosciuszko.

With the war's conclusion, Kosciuszko was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. Returning to Europe in 1784 to prevent

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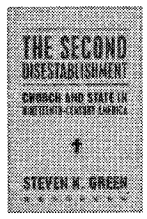

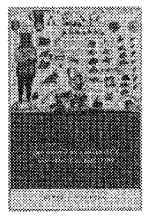

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foreclosure on his family's estate, he found his country corrupt and utterly beholden to Russia. He joined the ranks of reformers advocating independence, greater social equality, a stronger central government with a standing army, and a more democratic constitution. "Kosciuszko saw the Polish reform movement as a continuation of the American Revolution, and hoped that it would not stop until all slaves, serfs, and oppressed peoples were treated as equals," writes Storozynski. In 1789, Kosciuszko was commissioned to help train soldiers for a new Commonwealth army. Kosciuszko drafted a plan to create units drawn from all social classes, including peasants and Jews. But the magnates were no more willing to arm their peasants than American plantation owners had been to allow slaves to serve in the Continental Army, notes Storozynski.

Rousseau had warned would-be reformers against abrupt changes—to avoid "filling the republic with malcontents." The new constitution of 1791, in retrospect, attempted too much, too fast—a consequence, in part, of the impatience of reformers who sought to take advantage of the preoccupation of surrounding powers with wars in other places. With the support of a confederacy of Polish and Lithuanian magnates, Russia invaded and occupied the country, dashing all hopes of renewal. Prussia reneged on its alliance with Poland, Austria allowed the Russians to use its territory, and the Commonwealth's king, who had earlier made a show of supporting the new constitution, betrayed his troops, acceding to Russia's demands. A dejected Kosciuszko resigned his position and left the country in 1792.

It was his return two years later to lead a national uprising that would make Kosciuszko a legend, and Storozynski recounts the tale in all its sad glory. Arriving in Krakow in March 1794, Kosciuszko appealed to soldiers, clergy, and citizens of all social classes to join the rebellion. Amazingly, his band of only a few thousand men, including hundreds of peasants armed with no more than scythes, defeated Russian forces at Raclawice. To commemorate their gallantry, Kosciuszko donned a peasant's robe. The serfs cheered their "peasant prince." In Warsaw, Polish guards defected from the army and raided the arsenal, handing out weapons to the townspeople. Soon Warsaw was in rebel hands, followed by Vilnius.

As Kosciuszko had hoped, peasants and Jews were joining the rebellion. Kosciuszko went further. He issued the Proclamation of Polaniec, which, essentially, freed the peasants. He was convinced this was not only just, but the surest way to enlarge his rebel army. But for the nobility and clergy, who depended on peasant labor for their livelihood, this was a step too far.

Meanwhile, though Kosciuszko had been at pains to reassure the upper classes that the rebellion would not devolve into French-style mob rule, a group of Jacobins began publicly executing traitors. Stern words from Kosciuszko put an end to the violence and the Jacobins were prosecuted. But this principled stance in favor of the rule of law alienated France, whose support Polish rebels had been seeking.

As in his first war with the Russians, Kosciuszko proved an adroit military leader, holding out for months as Prussian and Russian troops laid siege to Warsaw. But the arrival of enemy reinforcements sealed the rebels' fate. Though hopelessly outmatched, he ordered his troops into battle, where they were defeated. He was severely injured and taken prisoner by the Russians who initially didn't recognize him: he was wearing a peasant's robe. By November the uprising was over.

Reading Storozynski's meticulously and extensively researched account, one cannot help being struck by Kosciuszko's uncompromising dedication to freedom, equality, and justice. But this, his greatest strength, was also perhaps his greatest flaw—a notion Storozynski recognizes but does not dwell upon. Kosciuszko was, in Jefferson's words, "as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known," and this is what brought about his failure. The same purity of principles and purpose for which he is admired left him, like his country whose tragic fate he shared, unprepared to compromise for the sake of a better, if imperfect outcome.

His failure notwithstanding, Kosciuszko became an international celebrity and an inspiration in the Old and New World alike. Having won the respect of his captors, he was eventually freed and given a hero's welcome wherever he went. For the rest of his life Kosciuszko never gave up his dream of restoring his country's independence, making his case to Napoleon, Czar Alexander, and the Congress of Vienna. But his refusal to play politics left him empty-handed, and he never again came as close as he had in 1794.

Perhaps it is the peculiar reverence we Eastern Europeans have for the uncompromising, self-immolating hero, and our admiration for the principles he lived by that inclines us to be forgiving of men like Kosciuszko. It is hard to wish for him to have been other than what he was. We wish, instead, for a world in which such courage and idealism are better rewarded.

Darius Udrys is a U.S. correspondent for Lithuanian State Radio and development manager at the Center for Civic Education, a non-profit organization that promotes education for democracy in the United States and 80 other countries.

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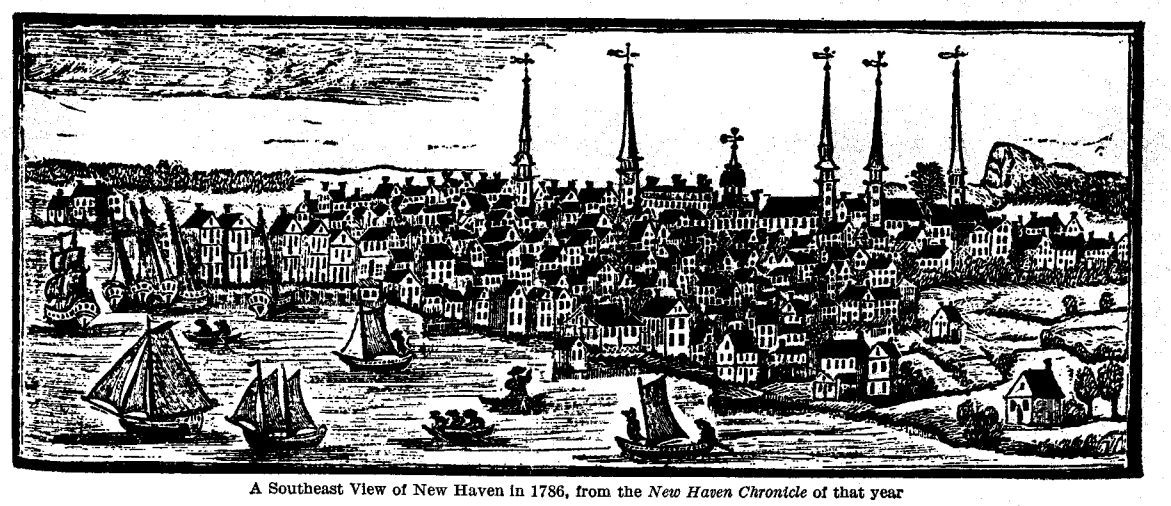
Book Review by Richard Samuelson

Processed History

Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815, by Gordon S. Wood.
Oxford University Press, 800 pages, $35



A Southeast View of New Haven in 1786, from the *New Haven Chronicle* of that year

Empire of Liberty, Gordon Wood's contribution to the Oxford History of the United States, is in many ways an excellent work of history. No other living historian could have brought together so much material and synthesized it so intelligently and, often, elegantly. Wood seems to have read everything written in the field in his lifetime.

The volume is not, however, exactly a *book*. It is not a unified work in which every paragraph fits together into a larger whole. Instead, it is two books in one. The first describes the political history of the United States from the inauguration of President Washington to the end of the War of 1812, and does so fairly well. The second frames that story with a broad narrative of cultural and social change in the United States from 1776 to roughly 1830, often with sweeping chapters on topics like "Republican Religion" and "Between Slavery and Freedom."

For Wood, the Alva O. Way University Professor and Professor of History Emeritus at Brown University, society and culture are in the driver's seat; politics is along for the ride. After the Revolution, Wood writes, Americans ceased to think they were "primitive folk living on the edges of Western civilization": "far from remaining on the periphery of the historical process, they now saw themselves suddenly cast into its center." Wood believes that historians are, at heart, students of this "process." They describe the changing "climate of opinion," often by noting how some people, unbeknownst to themselves, were "preparing the way for the future." History is the study of change over time. It is not the study of great statesmanship, and as Wood once said to me, history is not philosophy teaching by example.

Empire of Liberty recapitulates and expands upon the story Wood told in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992). The best parts are those dedicated to describing the great changes in society and culture that took place in the U.S. in the decades after the American Revolution. Wood focuses, in particular, on the rise and eventual victory of mass, middle-class society over the gentry-aristocracy. Though not a great storyteller, he is a good one, weaving a vast array of historical data into a coherent social narrative that reminds us of the confidence and the raw energy of the republic. Americans believed in themselves and had grand hopes for their country. They also were an anxious people. Both individuals and the republic had something to prove.

Once aristocratic markers ceased to distinguish the better sort from the rest, competition for place became intense, even as Americans denied that rank order should exist in society. That energy was harnessed by the market. Elkanah Watson, for example, "devised...what soon became the familiar American county fair, with exhibitions, music, dancing, singing, and prizes awarded for the best crops and the biggest livestock." Soon women were displaying their best "cloth, lace, hats, and other products of domestic manufacturing" in a parallel competition. Winners displayed their prizes, fostering "some tincture of envy"—which spurred everyone to harder work and to greater feats of production. Formerly, aristocrats held that only the fear of starvation would spur poor men to action. Americans discovered that the prospect of improvement would do the job much more effectively.

But Americans of this era did not just go to work, they also got busy. Population, at a bit over five million in 1800, was doubling every 20 years. Much of it was streaming west. In 1776, Wood notes, Kentucky "contained almost no white settlers. By 1800 it had become a state (1792) and grown to over 220,000." Tennessee's population "multiplied tenfold between 1790 and 1820." Settled states with extended backcountries saw a similar transformation. In upstate New York, one traveler noted, "axes were resounding and the trees literally were falling about us as we passed." The republic's leaders, particularly Federalists like George Washington and Henry Knox, tried to stem this tide, both because they wanted to oversee an orderly, republican settlement of the West, and because they knew that running the Indians off their lands would be a stain on the republic's honor. But the government lacked the authority and the resources, and perhaps the will, to stop the flow of settlement to the West.

Wood sees a similar dynamic at work in society as a whole. Children were leaving their parents' homes in droves to make their own way in the world elsewhere. Colleges were beset by unruly students, "on a scale never seen before or since in American

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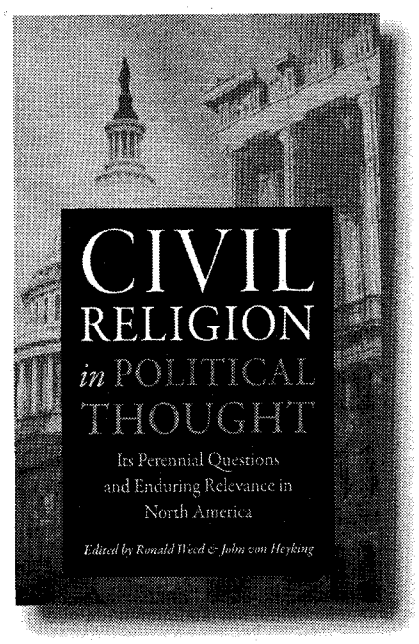
Civil Religion in Political Thought

Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America

Edited by
Ronald Weed & John von Heyking



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history." Americans were drinking more than at any other time in our history; the homicide rate increased, as did extra-marital pregnancy. Many of the old elites thought society was spinning out of control. Meanwhile, to vindicate American society against the aspersions of Europe, Americans grew to be committed to moral reform and moral causes. They flocked to see *Othello*, billed as "a Series of Moral Dialogues in Five Parts," and *Richard III*, dubbed "The Fate of Tyranny." The Second Great Awakening got underway, and the camp meeting was invented. All these reflected a popular, egalitarian morality, and all were infused with American pride.

In politics, the people demanded to be heard and to have their way. Anti-slavery became a popular cause for the first time in history and, mostly in the North, thousands of slaves were freed by their owners or by law. In high politics, common citizens had no time for either the traditional, hierarchical deference that, Wood says, the Federalists demanded, or the enlightened leadership that Jefferson represented. In the 1790s, as Wood tells the story, the Federalists made their last stand for traditional notions of statesmanship, virtue, and restraint. They failed.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison's program would be more congruent with the "libertarian impulses of America's republican ideology." Whereas Alexander Hamilton wanted to create a modern fiscal-military state, with its attendant administrative apparatus and "corruption," Madison and Jefferson wanted the federal government to be virtually invisible to the average American. Jefferson's attack on the social forms of diplomacy, with his rule of "pell-mell" (seating at state dinners would be open rather than according to rules of precedence), "reflected changes that were taking place in American society." Facing invasion in the War of 1812, Madison refused to change course. "Better to allow the country to be invaded and the capital burned than to build up state power in a European monarchical manner. It was a Republican war that Madison sought to wage in a republican fashion." Wood thinks that Madison was right. Despite the burning of Washington and other defeats, the United States did not fall. In fact, the War of 1812 established "for Americans the independence and nationhood of the United States."

As cultural and social history, all this is fairly solid, but it is not so solid as political, constitutional, and intellectual history. Wood implies that Jefferson and Madison's theories of government were vindicated, even if the messy forces of pluralism, self-interest, and middle class democracy pushed aside their brand of elite leadership. In fact, the rule of pell-mell was a failure and was soon repudiated. The idea of replacing war with embargoes failed. By 1815, Madison concluded not only that the Bank of the United States was a good thing, but also that it was constitutional. Similarly, by 1815, he and Jefferson realized that the U.S. could not remain a nation of farmers. Wood overlooks Madison's call for new national roads and canals in his annual message of 1815, although he does mention, in a separate chapter on "Republican Reforms," that Madison vetoed just such a bill—after John C. Calhoun drafted and pushed it through Congress. Did Madison change his mind on internal improvements in general, or did he, as his veto message suggested, want an amendment to legalize them? Wood doesn't ask.

Wood's desire for cultural generalization is often useful. He gives a very good account of the reasoning behind the Alien and Sedition acts, for example. His comment that the understanding of church-state separation in 1800 is very different from that of our Courts today is spot on. But the same cultural bias also causes difficulties, and leads him to cut corners or worse. He writes of "the universal and perpetual peace that every enlightened person, but especially Americans, yearned for." How many Americans yearned for perpetual peace? He does not say, but he implies that even sober republicans like John Adams were on board. Wood quotes one letter in which Adams wrote that, once nations respected neutral rights, "it would put an end forever to all maritime war." Wood cuts the next sentence: "However desirable this may be to humanity, how much soever philosophy may approve it and Christianity desire it, I am clearly convinced it will never take place." Nor does he quote Adams's statements mocking the idea of perpetual peace as philosophical folly. No matter.

For Wood, American history is about the movement of prevailing opinion in America down to one standard deviation. In this mode of history, neither individuals nor precise ideas matter. Ultimately, Wood's own belief in History gets in the way of his account of politics. He quotes Justice William Johnson's opinion in *Fletcher* v. *Peck* (1810), drawing upon "a general principle, on the reason and nature of things; a principle which will impose laws even on the Deity." Similarly he quotes Justice Joseph Story in *Terrett* v. *Taylor* (1815): "we think ourselves standing upon the principles of natural justice, upon the fundamental laws of every free government, upon the spirit and letter of the constitution." To most of America's greatest jurists, and to the founders, the U.S. Constitution was grounded, not on mere ideology, but upon truths "in the nature of things" that reason could discern. If one wishes to understand what they thought they were doing, one must describe their account of nature, even if their ideas were mistaken, or

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even if, as Wood seems to think, the idea that men can discern "the nature of things" is a delusion. Confident that he understands things better than his subjects do, he attributes their ideas to "the historical process," and in doing so necessarily simplifies or distorts history.

In *Empire of Liberty*, people are often surprised, baffled, and overwhelmed by events and changes in society. In the 1790s, "Jefferson and Madison scarcely understood the diverse social and sectional character of their followers." College students quoting Paine faced "bewildered clerical teachers." Repealing all laws against seditious libel left the Federalists "dumbfounded." Etc., etc. Wood's subjects seldom truly understand what's going on around them, especially when they don't like it. Ultimately, Wood's assumptions make it harder to give people and texts a nuanced reading. According to him, "Franklin, and, in fact, most of the Founders, believed in the efficacy of prayer as well as in some sort of afterlife." Franklin?! Surely he must be joking, as I'm nearly certain Franklin was.

NEAR THE CONCLUSION OF *EMPIRE OF LIBERTY* Wood explains his thinking:

> Educated and reflective observers found it increasingly difficult to hold to the eighteenth-century conspiratorial notion that particular individuals were directly responsible for all that happened.... [W]ith the spread of scientific thinking about society many of these sorts of conspiratorial interpretations began to seem increasingly primitive and quaint.

Is Wood correct? He might be. But perhaps he's simply a victim of the historical process. "Historians who write in aristocratic ages," Alexis de Tocqueville noted, "are wont to refer all occurrences to the particular will or temper of certain individuals." By contrast, a democratic way of life "naturally prompts the mind to search for that general reason which operates upon so many men's faculties at the same time, and turns them simultaneously in the same direction." In that sense, Wood is a democratic historian. Ultimately, his book, like Tocqueville's much deeper one, is an account of the influence of the general idea of equality on American society and culture and even, to a degree, its politics. In that sense, he is correct to connect the idea of sovereignty of the people with such 20th-century ideas as referendum and recall. They reflected, as did much in 19th-century America, a vulgarized notion of equality and sovereignty.

Still, by giving less attention to the constitutional idea of equality, the idea that binds 1787 with 1776 and that grounds American citizenship, Wood takes politics, in the high sense, out of the American regime. That's why he calls America's propensity to turn "quarrels over policy into contests over basic principles" nothing more than a "peculiar American tendency." It is not a direct result of the kind of revolution we had or of the kind of constitutional regime we created. Moreover, it is why his political history is not fully integrated with his social history. He is free to mention the "midnight appointments" nearly 150 pages after Jefferson's inauguration. Similarly, he claims that by not ratifying the Constitution until after Washington's inauguration, Rhode Island and North Carolina put themselves "outside the Union." Actually, their constitutional status is a very fraught question. Were the Articles of Confederation repudiated, or superseded, by the Constitution? A question like that has no place in this book. Next to the sweep of history, such trivia do not matter.

By telling the political history of the early republic from the perspective of social and cultural change, Gordon Wood truncates the political world. Far better would it be to follow the master in this subject, Henry Adams, and view the developing American culture from the perspective of high politics and statesmanship. Nonetheless, despite its limitations, *Empire of Liberty* will be an essential work for all teachers of American history for years to come.

Richard Samuelson is the 2009–2010 Garwood Visiting Fellow at Princeton University's James Madison Program and an assistant professor of history at California State University, San Bernardino.

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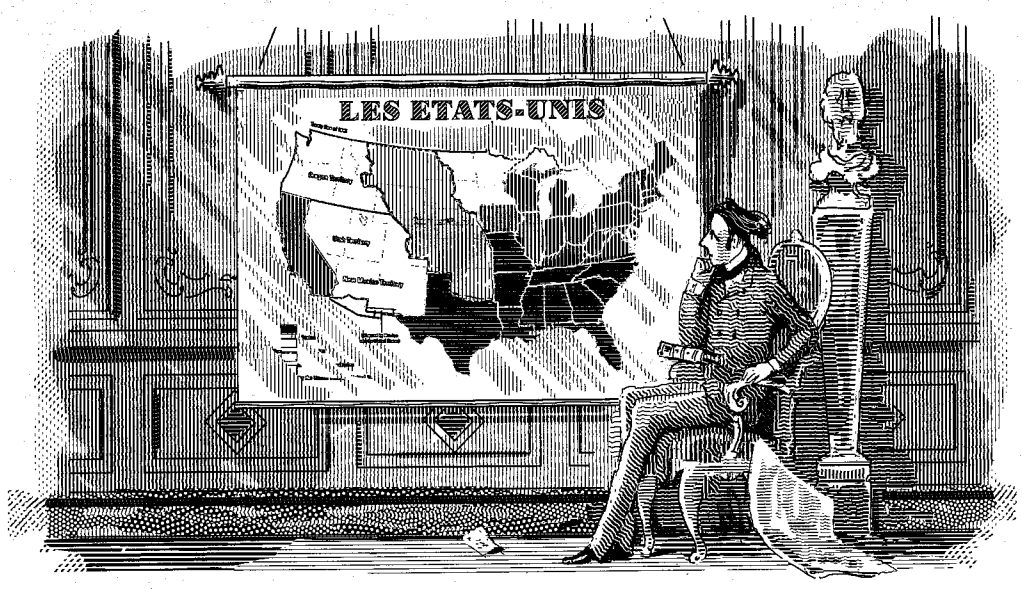
Book Review by Daniel J. Mahoney

A Friend of America and Liberty

Tocqueville on America after 1840: Letters and Other Writings, edited and translated by Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings. Cambridge University Press, 576 pages, $95 (cloth), $32.99 (paper)



Tocqueville on America after 1840 is a remarkable volume that includes *everything* the French political thinker and statesman wrote on the United States or American-related themes after the publication of the second volume of *Democracy in America* in 1840 until his death in 1859. Most of the material has previously appeared in French in the authoritative version of his *Oeuvres complètes*, but the vast majority is available in English for the first time—even some of the hand written letters to Tocqueville from his American interlocutors were transcribed for this volume. It is thus a treasure trove for students of Tocqueville and American democracy.

It has been proposed, most recently by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop in the penetrating Introduction to their translation of *Democracy in America*, that Tocqueville wrote the greatest book on America and on democracy. That claim, with which I broadly concur, is of course open to dispute. As Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings point out in their intelligent, well-informed Interpretive Essay, Tocqueville has had his share of French and American detractors, starting with the publication in 1835 of the first volume of *Democracy in America* and continuing to this day. Of course, not all criticisms are created equal. Some have accused him of getting his facts wrong, others of conflating things American and democratic. Some critics treat the book as a mere travelogue—a guide to Jacksonian America—or downplay its philosophical dimensions, and then criticize Tocqueville for his supposed mistakes. Others lament that he is increasingly treated in some circles—though not in any serious ones I know of—as an oracle whose insights are beyond reproach.

Whatever the merits of these criticisms, it is impossible to think seriously about America or democracy without studying Tocqueville. And thanks to the scholarly revolution of the last two generations, readers now have at their disposal the full range of his letters, speeches, and writings in authoritative editions in French and in English; new and competing English-language translations of *Democracy in America* and *The Old Regime and the Revolution*; at least two first-rate biographies—André Jardin's *Alexis de Tocqueville* (1988) and Hugh Brogan's *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life* (2007); not to mention scores of commentaries on his work. What is so welcome about *Tocqueville on America after 1840* is that it combines the requisite scholarly seriousness—its editors are among the top specialists on French political thought writing today—with a recognition that the study of Tocqueville finally belongs to all those who wish to come to terms with the intersection of American democracy and what Tocqueville himself did not hesitate to call "the cause of humanity"—the great cause of human liberty and dignity.

The editors' 39-page interpretive essay (accompanied by 14 small-print pages of notes) is an invaluable guide to Tocqueville's engagement with America over a 30-year period, from his nine-month trip with Gustave de Beaumont to the United States in 1831–32 until his renewed attentiveness to things American in the final decade of his life. Impressive as it is, the Interpretive Essay goes too far when it suggests that developments in the 1850s—the deterioration of American mores, a growing spirit of conquest and adventurism abroad, and most importantly and ominously, the spread of slavery in the territories—led Tocqueville "to the stark conclusion that America no longer held out hope for the friends of liberty around the world."

The editors contrast the "relatively optimistic image of American institutions" and the U.S. Constitution in the first volume of *Democracy* with the second volume's concerns about democratic individualism—the atomizing effects of democratic equality and the concomitant erosion of civic spirit and high human aspirations and achievement. Nevertheless, they argue that even the second volume "did not call into question the viability and maturity of American democracy." Craiutu and Jennings see a real difference between Tocqueville's forebodings in *Democracy in America* about the unfolding "democratic revolution" and the much more pessimistic evaluation he *would* have written if the portrait of America in his later correspondence had given rise to a third volume.

The editors accurately convey Tocqueville's disenchantment with the broad direction of American democracy in the 1850s. But the letters, speeches, and writings they have compiled do not show their author radically departing from his analysis in *Democracy*. To begin with,

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as the editors acknowledge, Tocqueville's growing pessimism during the 1850s had as much to do with the erosion of liberty in France during Napoleon III's quasi-despotic reign as it did with his renewed attention to America. What's more, Tocqueville was never quite as "optimistic" about democracy, even American democracy, as Craiutu and Jennings suggest. To be sure, he placed considerable hopes in the "great experiment of Self Government that is currently taking place in America," as he put it in a letter to Edward Vernon Childe in 1857. This experiment elevated democracy and was inseparable from its moral promise. Its failure, he told Childe, would "be the end of political liberty on earth." There is no evidence that Tocqueville ever *despaired* about America and her prospects. One can grant that a hypothetical third volume of *Democracy* might have gone further in emphasizing peril rather than promise, but the evils of democratic despotism, the possibility of unprecedented democratic forms of human degradation, and heartfelt warnings about the incompatibility of slavery with Christian morality and democratic self-government were already essential themes of the first two volumes.

NOT ONLY DOES *TOCQUEVILLE ON AMERICA after 1840* convey in multiple ways his rich and varied reflection on America and democracy, it also allows us to better appreciate the humanity of an authentically great man. Readers clearly hear the voice of a self-described "half Yankee" who valued his American friendships and sustained them over a long period of time. These friendships read like a who's who of the American political and intellectual scene, and provide a window on a world where heartfelt friendship coexisted with shared moral and intellectual concerns and a certain reserve about the expression of personal feelings. It was a world, now largely lost, where democracy and gentlemanliness coexisted.

Tocqueville's interlocutors included his American editor and anti-Masonic politician John Spencer, the lawyer and legal theorist Theodore Sedgwick, the international businessman N.W. Beckwith (who in his correspondence with Tocqueville articulated eloquent and humane democratic sentiments), and Harvard University president Jared Sparks, former editor of the *North American Review*. The Frenchman also exchanged respectful, substantive letters with the most distinguished political scientist of the day, Francis Lieber; the historian and diplomat George Bancroft; the anti-slavery Senator Charles Sumner, who was caned on the Senate floor by the pro-slavery congressman Preston Brooks; and Edward Everett, the scholar and Whig politician from Massachusetts who is best remembered today as the "other speaker" at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863.

In addition to exchanges about the great intellectual and political concerns of the day, we also see Tocqueville concerning himself with the practical sides of intellectual life: for example, arranging the American publication of *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, and in turn promoting the publication of his American friends abroad. From time to time he discretely inquired about his American railroad investments, which he feared (wrongly it turns out) had been wiped out by the terrible economic downturn of 1857. One of his most striking letters is to the young Edward Lee Childe, the son of Edward Vernon Childe and Mildred Childe, herself the younger sister of Robert E. Lee. She was a close friend of Tocqueville's and ran a celebrated salon in Paris. With a sympathetic and firm hand, Tocqueville wrote to the young Childe after his mother's death to encourage him to settle down and find a vocation for himself since self-respect and a sense of purpose were inseparable from a job well done. The Norman aristocrat knew the value of work and the dangers of aristocracy wrongly understood.

THE WRITINGS IN THIS VOLUME DO INDEED reflect Tocqueville's growing disillusionment with the United States in the final years of his life. But it was not always so. During the contentious political and constitutional debates that followed the 1848 French revolution—debates that had as their stake the kind of republic France would become—Tocqueville appealed to America as the contemporary model of a moderate democracy built on the firm foundation of the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the sturdy mores of a self-governing people. *Tocqueville in America after 1840* includes several key texts from this period that amply demonstrate his admiration for American constitutional democracy. In an impromptu campaign speech to a Popular Banquet at Cherbourg in Normandy on March 19, 1848, Tocqueville toasted "to the union of the two greatest republics that exist on the earth today." He added that "no other country in the world can furnish us [the French] with such useful examples and suggest such legitimate hopes." In his Preface to the 12th edition of *Democracy in America* published in the wake of the 1848 revolution, Tocqueville posed the "terrible question" whether the new French republic would be "a liberal republic or an oppressive republic, a republic that threatens the sacred rights of property and family or a republic that recognizes and consecrates them." The example of America provided inestimable help in recognizing those principles—"order, balance of powers, true liberty, sincere and deep respect for law"—that "are indispensable to all republics and must be common to all of them."

Tocqueville never repudiated these fundamental convictions. As he wrote in 1855, America's cause "remains the old good cause and it will...remain so for as long as I shall live." He did have concerns about the direction of American democracy and he articulated these in a series of remarkably candid letters to some of his most trusted American interlocutors. In one to Sedgwick in 1852, Tocqueville reiterates the concerns that he—"half an American citizen"—had about the "spirit of conquest, and even plunder, which has manifested itself among you for several years now." He adds—with reference to the threat of an ill-advised imperial adventure directed at Cuba—that this spirit of conquest "is not a sign of good health for a people that already has more territories than it can fill."

TODAY, CERTAIN LIBERAL POLITICAL THEORISTS have made something of a cottage industry out of trying to discredit Tocqueville because of his alleged fondness for imperialism. It is true that he was not opposed in principle to imperialism—whether that of the British in India or the French in Algeria, though he could be extremely critical of colonial abuses in both countries. He was open to the "greatness" of a humane, civilizing empire, which could act as a corrective, however problematic, to bourgeois democracy's individualist, materialist preoccupations. But he was adamantly opposed to slavery and in 1839 sponsored a bill in the Chamber of Deputies for its abolition in the French colonies. Tocqueville's letters to his American friends express serious reservations about colonialism *as an end in itself*, and ought to give pause to those "post-colonial" theorists committed to dismissing him as a single-minded partisan of imperial domination. In a letter to Sparks written a week after the one to Sedgwick, Tocqueville argued that America "has nothing to fear but from itself, from the excesses of democracy, the spirit of adventure and conquest, the sentiment of and the excessive pride in its strength, and the passions of youth." He counsels "moderation," which he insists is needed in nations "no less than individuals." In other letters, he expressed his concern that Americans were in the process of becoming like Hobbes's *puer robustus*—"robust children" who lacked the moderation and maturity to exercise their power in a responsible way.

Tocqueville's letters from this period suggest a series of related concerns that together reinforced his anxiety about the future of American democracy. He worried, and in retrospect inordinately so, about the massive influx of German immigrants to the United States. In his view they lacked the habits of self-government necessary to sustain liberty. He was also profoundly worried about what he perceived as a decline in American mores. He was convinced that the

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"spirit of adventurism" was dramatically at odds with the sound, sturdy character and respect for law he had heralded in *Democracy in America*. He lamented, too, the absence of real statesmen on the American scene and wondered if the sober common sense of the American people was enough to avoid impending disaster.

YET ALL OF THESE CONCERNS PALE BESIDE his greatest preoccupation during this period: the threat that the expansion of slavery posed to America's moral integrity, self-respect, and international prestige. For the most part, Tocqueville scholars (Craiutu and Jennings included) haven't noticed that their subject's positions on Union, liberty, abolitionism, and the expansion of slavery are in decisive respects the same as Abraham Lincoln's (though there is no evidence that the Frenchman ever commented on or even heard of him). Tocqueville articulates essentially Lincolnian judgments about these matters without ever appealing to—or even mentioning anywhere in his writings!—Lincoln's "glorious" Declaration of Independence. What accounts for this remarkable convergence between the sympathetic French commentator on America's unfolding tragedy and the statesman-poet who would so eloquently summon Americans back to the "better angels of our nature"?

For Tocqueville and Lincoln the heart of the matter was the same: the repeal of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the extension of slavery to new states and territories entailed a betrayal of America's moral promise. Both men affirmed blacks' humanity and intrinsic dignity. Both used their considerable intellectual and rhetorical powers to attack the dangerous conflation of self-government with the right to own and trade in human beings. But principle needed to be guided by prudence. Tocqueville, like Lincoln, was opposed to the abolitionists "as far as that party wanted to bring forth the premature and dangerous abolition of slavery in those districts where this abominable institution has always existed." He considered the spread of this "horrible plague onto a large portion of the earth which has been free from it until now" to be nothing less than a "crime against mankind," one that was "both dreadful and unpardonable."

In another letter, Tocqueville expressed himself in similar terms: "the extension of this horrible evil beyond the already too extensive limits within which it is confined" was "one of the greatest crimes that human beings could commit against the general cause of humanity." It filled him—a 50-year old Frenchman who had "seen four or five revolutions"—with "powerful political passions." The same might be said of Lincoln, who came out of political retirement with his 1854 Peoria speech, assailing the Kansas-Nebraska Act in order to recall Americans to "our ancient faith." This faith did not demand slavery's immediate abolition but it did require vigorous opposition to its expansion, as well as a renewed commitment to the bedrock truth that "all men are created equal."

In the Peoria speech Lincoln appealed to a "moral sense" argument by criticizing the reduction of some human beings to the status of animals, the equivalent of "wild horses, wild buffaloes, or wild bears." He pointed out that Americans had outlawed the slave trade in 1820 on punishment of death; they did "not so treat the man who deals in corn, cattle, or tobacco." What Stephen A. Douglas liked to call "the sacred right of self-government" could not include, Lincoln argued, the right to "govern another man *without that other's consent*." To do so would violate the moral law as well as that "sheet anchor of American republicanism, Our Declaration of Independence." Of course, everything stood or fell with the recognition of blacks' humanity, a recognition that Lincoln argued was grudgingly acknowledged even by the partisans of slavery when they and their children shunned those who traded in slaves.

TOCQUEVILLE'S OWN CASE AGAINST SLAVERY closely resembled Lincoln's. In 1855, at the request of the abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman, he composed a short, eloquent, and moving "Testimony Against Slavery" that appeared the following year in the anti-slavery journal *The Liberty Bell*. As a "persevering enemy of despotism everywhere" and "an old and sincere friend of America," Tocqueville expressed his chagrin that "the freest people in the world is, at the present time, almost the only one among civilized and Christian nations which yet maintains personal servitude." He was "uneasy" at "seeing Slavery retard her progress, tarnish her glory, furnish arms to her detractors, compromise the future career of the Union." He went on to speak about being "moved at the spectacle of man's degradation by man." Without explicitly appealing to either the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, he expressed his "hope" that he will "see the day when the law will grant equal civil liberty to all the inhabitants of the same empire, as God accords the freedom of the will, without distinction, to the dwellers upon earth." The call to "equal civil liberty" anticipated Lincoln's own noble call for "a new birth of freedom" in the Gettysburg address.

Tocqueville appealed to the decency, self-respect, and honor of a free, Christian, self-governing people. A free people cannot be a slave-owning people without compromising its soul or risking the loss of its liberty. Tocqueville's "silence" about the Declaration in both *Democracy in America* and in his later writings and letters about America has nothing to do with neglect for the affirmation of "common humanity" that undergirds it. As a Frenchman who had lived through the ravages of the French Revolution (and of subsequent French revolutions that appealed to its authority), Tocqueville had an understandable suspicion of "abstract" appeals to the "rights of man." In Europe, they had been used to undermine traditions and institutions that were necessary to the continuity of civilization and the moral foundations of representative government. In *Democracy in America*, with the French context ever in mind, Tocqueville emphasized the Americans' Puritan "point of departure." However "barbarous" some of their laws, the Puritans managed to successfully weave together the "spirit of liberty" and the "spirit of religion." And without losing sight of the great truth that "all men are created equal," Tocqueville emphasized the U.S. Constitution as a supreme act of moral and political prudence. It is a mistake to consult Tocqueville for an exhaustive account of the American Founding. Rather, we should turn to him for an unusually discerning account of American institutions and mores and for a penetrating description of the effects—all the effects—of modernity's unrelenting "democratic revolution." As this volume so richly demonstrates, the Norman aristocrat fully deserves his self-characterization as "half Yankee" and a "friend of America and liberty."

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND *TOCQUEVILLE ON AMERICA AFTER 1840* to anyone who wants to understand how one of the best friends this nation ever had responded to the moral and political crisis that led to the Civil War. It shows that Tocqueville remained America's steadfast friend, even if an increasingly frustrated and disappointed one. Reflecting on the fascinating materials that Aurelian Craiutu and Jeremy Jennings have so ably assembled and translated for us, I am struck by the underlying continuity of Tocqueville's judgments on modern democracy, and especially American democracy. It is true that the emerging crisis of the 1850s led him to question the extent to which America could serve as a model for friends of liberty and human dignity everywhere. But the great French political thinker and statesman never lost his faith in "the old good cause," and 150 years after his death he continues to serve as a wise and instructive bridge between the Old World and the New.

Daniel J. Mahoney is professor and chair of political science at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts. His latest book, The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order: Defending Democracy Against Its Modern Enemies and its Immoderate Friends, *will be published by ISI Books in fall 2010.*

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Book Review by John Blundell

Winter of Discontent

When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies, by Andy Beckett.
Faber & Faber, 576 pages, £20 (cloth), £9.99 (paper)

There is a curious divide in books about modern British history. On the one hand, there is the political studies establishment. With few exceptions, such as *The Politics of the Thatcher Revolution*, by Geoffrey K. Fry (2008), its offerings are banal and unreliable. When reviewing Mark Garnett's *From Anger to Apathy: The British Experience Since 1975* (2007), I was moved to conclude that he must have bought a job lot of recent celebrity biographies at his local charity shop. Even the "magisterial" two-volume Thatcher biography by John Campbell (2000–03) had me fact-checking.

On the other hand, there are the contemporary British historians such as Richard Cockett, long now at *The Economist* (see his *Thinking The Unthinkable—Think Tanks and the Economic Counter Revolution 1931–1983*, published in 1994), and the journalists whose largely unsubsidized output towers above that of the mostly tax-funded professors. From the ranks of journalists and other observers one only has to think of such works as *The Commanding Heights: The Battle Between Government and the Marketplace that is Remaking the Modern World*, by Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw (1998); *The President, the Pope, and the Prime Minister: Three Who Changed the World*, by John O'Sullivan (2006); *Thatcher & Sons: A Revolution in Three Acts*, by Simon Jenkins (2007); and *A History of Modern Britain*, by Andrew Marr (2007), to realize that a huge quality gulf exists. Indeed, the gulf is so large that if I were a political scientist I would be trembling about the future of my profession and looking into retraining as a historian or journalist.

Consequently, I was hugely relieved on being sent close to 600 pages of *When the Lights Went Out* to discover that the author is not some itinerant red brick university lecturer desperately pandering to current and future employers, but rather a distinguished (for his years) journalist who studied history at Oxford and journalism at Berkeley. Appropriately the book was published on the 30th anniversary of Mrs. Thatcher's 1979 general election victory.

The U.K. in the 1970s was certainly tumultuous, much more so than in the '50s, '60s, '90s, and Noughties; and more so than in the late '40s and the '80s when first Clement Attlee and then Margaret Thatcher drove huge change largely unopposed. In the 1970s we were on the brink, in the last chance saloon. One *Daily Telegraph* headline read "Cheer Up: Things are Getting Worse!" as in they are getting *so* bad we might actually get meaningful change. The war in Northern Ireland had spread to the mainland; there was the three-day week and talk of a two-day week; Treasury versus International Monetary Fund; government versus the unions; Heath versus Thatcher; U.K. sovereignty versus Europe; and the "Reds" (Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight, *et al.*) versus the local taxpayers. It all ended with the utterly appalling Winter of Discontent, which ran from January 3 (or earlier according to Beckett) to March 28, 1979.

On top of six years of double-digit inflation Brits now enjoyed the disruption of gas supplies; widespread picketing; one million people laid off work; ambulances not responding to 911 calls; mountains of uncollected trash; strikes by gravediggers that led Chief Medical Officers to plan mass burials at sea; food shortages; hospital union leaders deciding whom to admit and, if people died, then "so be it" as one of them so famously said; trolleys of food destined for old folks' homes being overturned; and the then-nationalized British Rail's press release: "There are no trains today." The West German ambassador said we had the economy of East Germany and the French Ambassador said we suffered from "dégringolade" or falling-down sickness. So-called serious commentators opined that Japan and Germany were "lucky" that so many of their factories had been destroyed; this had forced them to modernize. The U.K. had not been so "lucky" and struggled with old plant. My great mentor F.A. Hayek quietly confided in me, "I do not think the solution to our economic problems is to destroy all our capital."

When the lights went out is a terrific book, and I only worry that its sales will be much reduced by its jacket blurb from "Red" Ken Livingstone: "No one will ever write a better biography of the 1970s.... The decade formed my politics and Andy Beckett captures it perfectly.... I just couldn't put it down." It is a great endorsement albeit with a hollow ring: Ken was first elected to local public office in May 1971 and to regional office two years later, and his politics were already blindingly clear. It is a pity there is not an equally positive but countervailing blurb from, say, a Boris Johnson.

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I particularly enjoyed the many moments when Beckett gets on a train or a bus and goes either to visit the place he is discussing or to interview a key player or witness to a major event or, in several cases, both at the same time. This device brings a freshness and vitality to the narrative; it is colorful and interesting and often funny. He also deftly weaves in references from popular culture in a smooth and informative way. Taken all in all, the book is so rich the professors do not stand a chance.

Prime ministers Harold Wilson and Edward Heath dominate the book's first half, and Jim Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher its second. Between the four of them, they occupied 10 Downing Street from 1964 to 1990, more than a quarter of a century, and the historian Francis Beckett (any relation?) ranks them first (Thatcher), third (Heath), eleventh (Wilson), and thirteenth (Callaghan) of the 20 prime ministers of the 20th century. I much preferred the second half of the book, but this does not reflect on the excellence of the scholarship and analysis in the first half at all; it is simply because if I had the chance to travel back to any five-year period after World War II, it would have to be 1975 to 1980. Beckett brings those five years alive, brings it all back to me. The debates in all of the parties, the unions, inflation, the awful nationalized industries, and finally the Winter of Discontent—it is all there and much more.

I had just three regrets. One is the complete lack of reference to "Red" Ken Livingstone and "Red" Ted Knight, who rose to such prominence in local government in London during the '70s. Related to that is my second regret that Peter Mandelson fails also to appear. Yes, the book stops on May 4, 1979, as Mrs. Thatcher enters Downing Street. Four months later, Mandelson won the Lambeth Council by-election which in turn gave him the platform to give Red Ted a public verbal lashing every six weeks at the main council meeting. As the '70s ended, that was the real start of New Labour, Mandelson's rejection of all that Reds Ted and Ken represented. I was there at the birth as a very young London councilman.

My third regret is that of all the many middle class groups which came into being circa 1974–75 only NAFF, the National Association For Freedom, is mentioned (in great detail, in the single longest chapter in the book). Edward Heath's twin defeats in general elections in 1974, especially the first one at the hands of the miners in February, shook respectable middle England into a rebellion that is not quite captured here. It was out of that era that the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) emerged, and while NAFF has coasted in recent decades and dropped off the radar screen, the FSB has grown to 250,000 members. It is said that government inspectors think twice about entering a business displaying the Federation's logo, such is the power of its legal insurance protection scheme. No political history of the U.K. in the '70s can be complete without the FSB's story.

I look forward to Andy Beckett's next book. I hope it will be called *When the Lights Went On: Britain in the Eighties*!

John Blundell is formerly director general and Ralph Harris Fellow of the Institute of Economic Affairs, and is now a distinguished senior fellow of that organization. He is the author of Margaret Thatcher: A Portrait of the Iron Lady *(Algora).*

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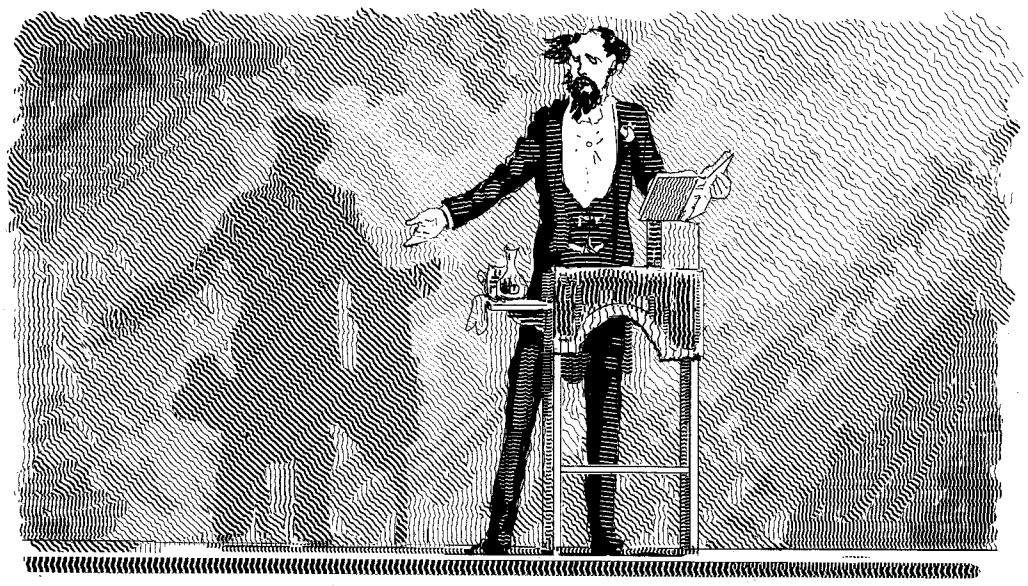
Book Review by Paul A. Cantor

Ink-Stained Genius

Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing, by Michael Slater.
Yale University Press, 720 pages, $35



Writing a biography of Charles Dickens is not an enviable task. It is much like trying to paint a portrait of Rembrandt—the Dutchman already did such a good job himself. If, as everyone now assumes, Dickens's novels are autobiographical, then we already possess a sketch of his life, as told by one of the master storytellers of all time. It takes a kind of courage, bordering on foolhardiness, to be a biographer of Dickens. Who wants to invite comparison with a writer universally acclaimed for his ability to bring a human being to life on the page?

It would therefore be unfair of me to dwell upon the fact that Michael Slater cannot tell a story as well as Dickens could. As a past president of the International Dickens Fellowship and the Dickens Society of America, Slater has impeccable credentials as a scholar on his subject. His new book, *Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing*, is obviously the product of a lifetime of study, and offers a rich compendium of facts concerning the novelist's career. Slater tries hard to create a compelling narrative out of his subject's life, and he certainly has a great deal of dramatic material with which to work. He even ends some of his chapters with the kind of cliffhangers that were Dickens's stock-in-trade, as he sought to keep the readers of the weekly or monthly installments of his novels coming back for more.

But Slater's narrative becomes repetitious, and he sometimes jumps awkwardly backwards and forwards in his story. Occasionally what read like notes to himself seem to have survived into the printed text, such as: "Details of Dickens's arrangements with his publishers about the American trip belong to the next chapter." As he follows Dickens as a writer year by year, his narrative develops a flat character. It is as if all moments in Dickens's life become equal. Slater devotes as much space to one of the Christmas issues Dickens organized for his magazines *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* as he does to such masterpieces as *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*.

Yet what I am calling a weakness in Slater's book might also be regarded as its great strength—his willingness to survey everything Dickens wrote, not just the familiar highlights. It is easy to be overwhelmed just by Dickens's titanic output as a novelist. But Slater usefully calls our attention to the fact that Dickens was much more than a novelist. He was a journalist, playwright, essayist, short-story writer, travel writer, children's book writer, editor, and publisher, and in his private life he was a prolific and—not surprisingly—remarkably entertaining letter writer. Slater has evidently read just about everything Dickens ever wrote, and offers us the first systematic, thorough account of his literary career (some of the material, such as the journalism and letters, has only recently become readily accessible).

For the majority of us, who will never read more than a fraction of Dickens's total output, Slater's book provides a welcome opportunity to get a sense of how truly vast and varied his work was. For example, how many people are aware that, together with his protégé Wilkie Collins, Dickens wrote a play called *The Frozen Deep*, a response to the ill-fated Franklin Expedition to discover a Northwest Passage in the arctic wastes of Canada? Or that later Dickens and Collins, this time responding to the 1857 Indian Mutiny that shook the British Empire to its foundations, produced a timely story called "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners"? Neither work is a masterpiece, but both reveal aspects of Dickens's talents that are often overlooked, and they also fill out our understanding of his views on important subjects, such as British imperialism.

Given Slater's focus on Dickens's literary career, readers who come to this book with the usual gossipy interest in a new biography may be disappointed. For all his research, Slater provides no new revelations about Dickens's life. By and large, he tells the familiar story of Dickens's unhappy childhood, his frustrations in his marriage and family life, and his clandestine love affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. Like most biographers, Slater traces Dickens's insecurities and compulsions as an adult—above all, his obsessive need to be loved—back to his humiliation and sense of abandonment as a child, when he was forced, due to his father's financial irre-

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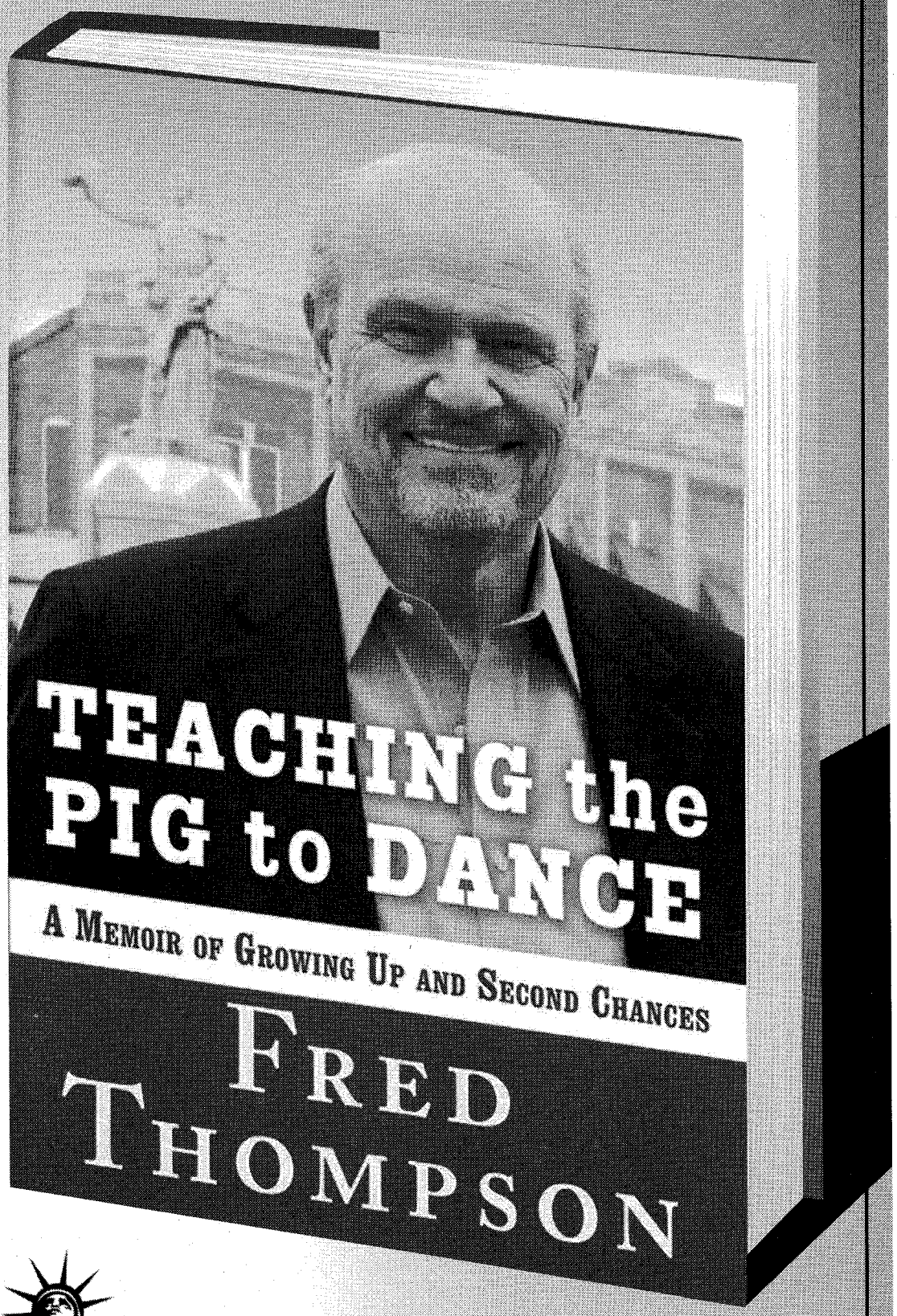
"Teaching Latin to someone like me was like trying to teach a pig to dance."

In his sometimes hilarious yet honest and warm memoir, Fred Thompson touches on the influences—family, hometown neighbors and teachers, team sports, jobs, romances, and personal crises—that molded his character, his politics, and the way he looks at life today.



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sponsibility, into the menial job of putting labels on bottles of shoe polish.

On several important subjects, Slater leaves his readers largely in the dark. He says almost nothing about Dickens's religious beliefs, and, despite many references to his health problems in his later years, he does not clarify in modern medical terms exactly what Dickens was suffering from. Perhaps Slater is so familiar with his subject that he forgot what needs to be explained to the general reader. I am afraid that Americans, with their limited knowledge of British history, may find this book tough going at times. Slater does not do much to explain the larger historical context of important moments in Dickens's life. Americans are left to wonder what the Crimean War was all about or what the Corn Laws were (the latter had nothing to do with what Americans call "corn," and, as for the former, to be honest, even at the time very few people knew what the Crimean War was about). Admittedly Slater cannot be expected to offer a crash course in Victorian history in this already jam-packed volume, but he might have spent a few sentences sketching the context. Similarly, he expects his readers to be familiar with the significant literary figures of the Victorian era, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, and George Eliot, whom he introduces into his narrative as if his readers already knew their importance.

Thus I hesitate to recommend Slater's book as an introduction to Dickens for the general reader. Nor can his biography be recommended as a work of literary criticism. Now and then Slater devotes a paragraph to the aesthetic aspects of Dickens's novels, discussing, for example, his use of the sea as an organizing symbol in *Dombey and Son*, or offering reasons for his unusual combination of first- and third-person narration in *Bleak House*. But these are rather elementary observations and this ground was well covered by literary critics decades ago. Most of the analysis is biographical in nature. In what might be dubbed the *Amadeus* or *Shakespeare in Love* method, Slater is mainly interested in showing how Dickens mined his personal experience to create his fictional characters. In a moment typical of this approach, Dickens visits an opium den and sees "a haggard old woman blowing at a pipe" and she soon emerges as the Princess Puffer in his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. There is nothing wrong with this straightforward kind of biographical criticism—especially in a biography—but when pursued relentlessly, it can become tiresome, and threatens to reduce Dickens to a mere chronicler of his day-to-day existence.

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WHY DO I NEVERTHELESS INSIST, THEN, that Slater's work is very much worth reading? True to his basic purpose, his is one of the best studies I know of the life of a professional writer precisely in his capacity as a professional writer. The book offers a minutely detailed, step-by-step account of Dickens's whole literary career, from his early and spectacular popular success with *Pickwick Papers*, to his establishment as a respectable man of letters, to his unprecedented and unparalleled domination of the literary scene, throughout the English-speaking world, for the rest of his life. Slater gives sales figures for almost everything Dickens wrote, circulation numbers for the periodicals he edited, the juicy financial details of the many contracts he made—and broke—with publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, and also attendance figures for the public readings Dickens started giving in the late 1850s. This book would be invaluable if it did nothing more than assemble all this vital data conveniently in one volume. What I would give to have comparable facts and figures for Shakespeare's literary career!

Slater provides an intimate portrait of a writer who flourished in the rough-and-tumble, topsy-turvy world of the Victorian publishing business. As such, his biography can help dispel a number of Romantic myths that have grown up about the nature of literature and art in general, myths that have distorted our understanding of creativity. Dickens is one of the supreme masters of the novel in the English—or any other—language. And yet he emerged right in the middle of the world of commercial publishing, and never left it for a moment throughout his literary career. As Slater documents, from the beginning to the end, Dickens wrote for a largely middle-class audience, and, far from denigrating the bourgeoisie in Romantic fashion, he embraced it and welcomed his role as its spokesman and champion.

According to the Romantic myth that emerged in the early 19th century, just before Dickens began writing, the true artist must be a solitary genius. As a visionary, he is ahead of his time and at odds with his contemporaries. He must pursue his art in isolation, because any attempts at accommodation with his contemporaries would inevitably compromise his vision and integrity as an artist. The Romantic genius is a perfectionist. Catching a glimpse of the ideal world gives him a pattern of perfection according to which he must shape his work in an unimpeded frenzy of fevered creation. The resulting work, as the product of a single moment of inspiration, embodies an organic perfection that could only be corrupted if others had a hand in its production, or if it were shaped with an audience in mind—especially a middle-class audience.

The great enemy of the Romantic genius is the world of commerce. Artistic activity must never be governed by commercial considerations, which would dilute if not destroy the artist's inspiration. Hence in the Romantic view, the true artist will never be successful with the public. With its attachment to conventional ideas of art, the mass audience cannot appreciate a forward-looking genius. If, by some accident, the public embraces the work of an authentic genius, it will be for the wrong reasons, and, in his ongoing development, he will soon outgrow his audience, leave them in his aesthetic wake, and alienate his original admirers. In what amounted to a declaration of spiritual war on the middle class, Romanticism pictured the true artist as a perpetually embattled figure, inevitably at odds with the general public and its unremitting tendency to reduce artistic values to commercial ones.

This is an intimate portrait of a writer who flourished in the rough-and-tumble, topsy-turvy world of the Victorian publishing business.

As dated as some of this overheated rhetoric may sound today, this image of the artist is still very much with us, for example, in the ongoing claims that government support is necessary to shield true artists from the commercial world's philistine demands. The Romantic conception is valid for a certain kind of artist—namely, the Romantic. Certainly a lot of great art has been produced by artists who thought of themselves as solitary geniuses, warring against an unenlightened public. One thinks of William Blake, who was a masterful poet but in his whole life never sold as many copies of all his works taken together as Dickens typically sold of one installment of one of his books in a single day.

But the Romantic conception of the artist is misleading when it is set up as the sole model of creativity. It becomes especially misleading when unpopularity is offered as evidence in itself of an artist's greatness. Together with Shakespeare, Dickens offers the most effective counterargument to the Romantics' pure disjunction between artistic and commercial success.

FAR FROM STRUGGLING FOR YEARS TO GAIN recognition for his genius, Dickens was an overnight success if ever there were one. By the time he was 24, his *Pickwick Papers* had become one of the great publishing phenomena of the 19th century. As an early sign of the way he was to become a celebrity in the full modern sense of the term, Pickwick-themed products were soon being sold all over London. Once he broke out as a novelist, he never stumbled and went from success to success in his early career in a way that has rarely been equaled. The first installment of *Nicholas Nickleby* sold 50,000 copies on the day of publication. The story that began in a periodical called *Master Humphrey's Clock* and was to become the novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* sold 70,000 copies in its first installment, and, once he started focusing on the character of Little Nell, the serial reached a record-breaking circulation of 100,000 copies.

From novel to novel, he continued to grow as an artist, experimenting with new techniques and themes, pushing the limits of the form, and constantly reinventing the way it was marketed. He was a critical as well as a commercial success; despite some carping comments, contemporary reviewers quickly recognized that a new literary genius had burst upon the scene. According to the Romantic conception of art, Dickens should have maintained his success with the public only by pandering to it and slavishly sticking to the commercial formula that pleased his readers in the first place. But in fact he did just the opposite. As he grew older, his novels became more serious in tone, more biting in their satire of contemporary social and political conditions, and darker in the realms of psychology they explored. And yet, despite challenging his readers, he never lost his audience or his preeminence among Victorian novelists.

To be sure, his sales figures went up and down. Dickens had a hard time equaling the amazing success of his early works, when he was writing with virtually no competition. Still, his later works sold at rates that would make him the envy of most authors today. *Bleak House* is one of his darkest novels, and yet the initial print run of its first installment sold 25,000 copies in three days. *Little Dorrit* may be even more depressing, but it sold even more copies—38,000 of its first installment in a month. Dickens unfortunately died in the middle of writing his last novel, *Edwin Drood*. The 22 chapters he wrote suggest that this was going to be the bleakest of all his works, exploring the psychology of a murderer, linked to opium addiction and other secrets out of the Orient. Yet the first installment of *Drood* sold 50,000 copies—a clear sign his popularity was undiminished until the day he died.

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Defenders of Romanticism might console themselves with the thought that, even though Dickens achieved and maintained popularity with a mass audience, he did so in Romantic fashion, on the strength of his individual genius. But Slater shows that Dickens's genius did not operate in isolation; he was in fact unusually gregarious as an author. He felt a compulsive need to make contact with his audience, and loved to parade his art in public. This compulsion took the form of a life-long devotion to amateur theatricals. He virtually never missed an opportunity to appear on stage in both tragedies and comedies, and Slater offers a wide range of testimonials that, had he chosen to go professional, he could have been one of the most successful stage actors of his day. Thackeray put it bluntly: "If that man would now go upon the stage he would make his £20,000 a year" (the equivalent of several million dollars in today's terms). Dickens's need for living contact with an audience culminated in his decision to go on tour with public readings from his novels and other fiction. These readings became an obsession in the last decade or so of his life (and most biographers, including Slater, argue that the strain they caused him hastened Dickens's death). On his inaugural tour of England, Ireland, and Scotland in 1858, he gave a total of 85 readings, averaging "five or six a week" by Slater's calculation.

There is no question that Dickens had financial motives for these readings. He made £2,500 for a series of 42 performances in Britain in 1867, and his 1867–68 American tour netted him an impressive profit of £38,000, a sum that amounted, Slater reports, to "between a quarter and a fifth of his estate at his death." But Dickens did not give his readings solely for the money.

> [E]ach performance allowed him literally to "write a book in company." ...He performed alone just as he wrote alone in his study. Here, however, he was working not with his mind's eye upon a host of imaginary readers but with his physical eyes upon real readers present before him in flesh and blood, and responding, as he sometimes expressly encouraged them to, with audible sobs and laughter to his narrative as it came from his lips.

Relishing this intimate contact with a live audience, Dickens enjoyed recreating his masterpieces in front of his adoring public. He sometimes departed from his prepared text, to deepen the impression that his enraptured listeners were experiencing a story coming into being right before their eyes and ears.

In the romantic view, the integrity—and greatness—of an author rests crucially on his being wholly true to his own inner vision, and never altering a word at the behest of another. Dickens certainly could be stubborn as an author and repeatedly fought with editors and publishers to get his works into print the way he wrote them. But in the long run he proved to be remarkably pliant for a literary genius. In the most famous instance, he allowed his friend and fellow novelist, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, to persuade him to change the ending of *Great Expectations*, so that Pip and Estella marry instead of staying apart, as they do in the conclusion Dickens originally wrote. This is no minor alteration, and many critics have faulted the novel for having what we would call a "Hollywood ending."

My biggest surprise in reading Slater's book was to learn of the active role that Dickens's friend—and initial biographer—John Forster played in shaping the published texts that we assume were solely the responsibility of the great Charles Dickens. At times, Dickens even put Forster wholly in charge of correcting the galley-proofs of his works. As Slater reports, Forster "was often authorized to make cuts or alterations at his own discretion and Dickens constantly discussed his characters and the story's development with him." Forster turned out to be a good biographer, but he was hardly a true author, and I still find it difficult to believe that Dickens turned over so much responsibility for his texts to someone who obviously was not in his league as a writer.

> Dickens was at his happiest when he was down in the trenches of publishing, with the enlisted men, grappling with the nuts and bolts of the day-to-day business of getting out a periodical.

But there was something democratic in Dickens's attitude toward the literary process, and he did not fancy himself as beyond the need for help as a practicing writer. Slater records a characteristic incident when

> chairing a public meeting of the Printers' Readers' Association, called to demand better wages and conditions, [Dickens] acknowledged "most gratefully" the great debt that he as a writer owed to printers' readers. "I have never," he told his audience, "gone through the sheets of any book that I have written without having had presented to me...some slight misunderstanding into which I have fallen, some little lapse I have made..., some unquestionable indication that I have been closely followed through my work by a patient and trained mind."

I cannot imagine Romantics like Lord Byron or Percy Shelley—for all their democratic sympathies—paying such an eloquent tribute to the contribution of lowly proofreaders to their art. It says something about Dickens and his conception of authorship that he was willing to acknowledge the role of the print shop in perfecting, or at least correcting, his masterpieces.

In sum, Dickens did not in Romantic fashion feel himself raised like some creative god far above the sordid world of commercial publishing. Rather he immersed himself in that world, often as an editor and publisher himself, correcting the work of authors even as he allowed his own work to be corrected. One gets the impression from reading Slater's biography—and this may be its greatest virtue—that Dickens lived the life of commercial publishing with total commitment. He was at his happiest when he was down in the trenches of publishing, with the enlisted men, as it were, grappling with the nuts and bolts of the day-to-day business of getting out a periodical.

Whatever romantic notions of authorship he may have begun with, Dickens learned to accept the realities of 19th-century publishing and even to embrace them. And that means that Dickens quickly came to think of writing as a process, in which he developed his works over time, with help from all his associates in the publishing business and feedback from the reading public. With typical Romantic bravado, Percy Shelley proclaims in his manifesto *A Defence of Poetry*: "When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet." In this quite prevalent understanding of art, perfection can be achieved only in a single moment of total aesthetic illumination, when the artist sees the whole work laid out before him with all its details perfectly organized in advance. But as Slater's detailed account of his professional career reveals, Dickens always insisted on how hard he labored on his

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novels, and how much time he had to devote to get them into shape.

The remarkable success of his early novels showed that serialization was then the best way to market popular novels, and throughout his career he was stuck with a publishing format of which he had become the acknowledged master. He was not entirely happy with this system, and he often complained that serial publication cramped his style. Like several of his contemporaries, Dickens longed to escape from the shackles of serialization, always hoping that someday he would be free to write a novel at his leisure. At a minimum, as Slater indicates, he struggled to get ahead of schedule, to have several installments of a projected novel in the bank, as it were, before the process of serialization began. But the pressures of his many other commitments usually reduced him to his standard position of writing barely one step ahead of the printer. Sometimes he had to come up with new material at the print shop when the proofs showed that he had underwritten an installment and needed some additional pages. As a result, he was often forced to improvise, and revise—or sometimes completely change—his initial plans as he went along. Dickens became in effect a prisoner of a system he himself had done much to create.

As Slater shows, Dickens was very sensitive to the charge from critics that he did not plot out his novels in advance. Especially early in his career, hostile reviewers questioned his skill in constructing a plot, comparing him unfavorably in that respect to Henry Fielding. Critics complained that he lacked an architectonic sense, and achieved his best effects only on the local level. Over the years, Dickens worked on the structural problems, and began to write memoranda to himself to plan his novels out from the beginning. His notes have survived, and Slater records and discusses them in detail, making clear that Dickens often knew quite well where his novels were headed, and planned out striking juxtapositions or recurrent symbols or other calculated narrative effects. Nevertheless, these notes reveal just as clearly how often he changed his mind in midstream, and how often he allowed a chance occurrence in his life to alter his conception of a given work.

The romantic theory of organic form attempts to banish contingency from the aesthetic realm. The history of Dickens's career shows that accidents, sudden hunches, midterm corrections, concessions to the audience, and artistic about-faces may have a legitimate role to play in literary creation. In Romantic fashion, we may choose to imagine Dickens in some parallel universe, in which he was freed of all commercial pressures and had all the time in the world to plan his works out in advance and to find just the right word for everything he wished to express. In such an artistic paradise, Dickens might have produced a 25-page short story of such jewel-like perfection that it would have brought tears to the eyes of Gustave Flaubert or Walter Pater. But in such a parallel universe, would we still have *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*?

It is easy to read about Dickens's life and conclude that he was one of the unhappiest men who ever lived. According to his own accounts of his life and his fictional recreations of it in works such as *David Copperfield*, his childhood was miserable. His marriage became loveless, if it did not start that way, and the behavior of his vast assortment of relatives and dependents caused him endless anxieties, financial and otherwise. What appears to have been his deep love for Ellen Ternan was unfortunately something he could not enjoy in public, but instead had to struggle to keep secret to his dying day.

It is a very sad story—until one begins to focus, not on his personal but his professional life. What Michael Slater shows is that, for good or ill, Dickens devoted far more hours of his waking life to his career as a writer than he did to his family or other personal matters. And insofar as he lived the life of a writer, it must have been one of the happiest any man has ever enjoyed. At his farewell reading shortly before he died in 1870, he took the opportunity to thank his public and to speak of how their response to his work had permitted him to enjoy "an amount of artistic delight and instruction which, perhaps, is given to few men to know." He was always confident that he was good at what he did, and for all the signs of personal insecurity in his life, there are almost no signs of creative doubts. When it came to his literary talent, he had no modesty, false or otherwise. He was conscious of just how great he was as a writer, and Slater quotes him frequently marveling at his own ability in letters to his friends. Trumpeting his ability to move seamlessly from writing *David Copperfield* to churning out a story for *Household Words* on the spot, Dickens patted himself on the back: "What an amazing man!" He was right.

Paul A. Cantor is Clifton Waller Barrett Professor of English at the University of Virginia. His most recent book, co-edited with Stephen Cox, is Literature and the Economics of Liberty: Spontaneous Order in Culture *(Ludwig von Mises Institute).*

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Book Review by Steven B. Smith

Nazi or Philosopher?

Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935, by Emmanuel Faye, translated by Michael B. Smith. Yale University Press, 464 pages, $40

Sometime shortly after the publication of Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism* (1987), I recall a conversation with the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre who complained that the title of Farias's book was misleading. The "and" suggested that Heidegger was one thing and National Socialism something else; the correct word should have been "is." The publication of Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* would seem to be the work that MacIntyre was looking for.

Faye is far from the first to detail Heidegger's love affair with the Nazis. In addition to Farias, it suffices to mention the work of Hugo Ott and Guido Schneeberger in Germany and Tom Rockmore and Richard Wolin in the United States. But the links between Heidegger and Nazism have never been drawn so clearly and explicitly as Faye draws them. Indeed, Faye goes farther—much farther—than Heidegger's earlier critics. Most of Heidegger's critics have been content to ask the question how could a great philosopher be a Nazi? Faye, an associate professor at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, argues that Heidegger's embrace of National Socialism is sufficient to eliminate him from the ranks of philosophy altogether.

In Faye's view, Heidegger systematically distorted the meaning of philosophy to make it serve the ends of Nazi propaganda. What else can you say of a man who used apparently philosophical titles such as "The Fundamental Question of Philosophy," "Of the Essence of Truth," and "Logic" to smuggle in doctrines of Aryan supremacy, *völkisch* German nationalism, and the *Führerprinzip*? Henceforward, Faye argues, Heidegger's works should be removed from the philosophy sections of libraries and bookstores and placed under the category of Nazi Studies. A strong thesis, to say the least.

The book concentrates on Heidegger's work of the mid-1930s, at the height of his enthusiasm. Faye begins with a brief, selective treatment of proto-Nazi themes in Heidegger's masterpiece *Being and Time* (1927), but concentrates on his speeches, seminars, and writings from the 1933–45 period. In addition to the heavily redacted *Gesamtausgabe* (*Complete Works*), Faye has had access to previously unpublished seminar materials in which Heidegger often speaks more openly and politically than in the published texts.

The best parts of the book are devoted to Heidegger's relations with other Nazi celebrities like Alfred Baeumler, Alfred Rosenberg, Ernst Jünger, and Carl Schmitt. We learn in great detail how Heidegger used his position of Rector at the University of Freiburg to introduce the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung* or forcing the university into the party line and instituting a purge of Jewish faculty members, including his aged dissertation advisor Edmund Husserl. A seminar on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* taught in the winter of 1934–35 provides a case study of how Heidegger tried to enlist Hegel into the cause of Hitler's Reich. Carl Schmitt, the famous Nazi legal theorist, had declared in his book *State, Movement, People* (1933) that Hegel's constitutional state died in Germany on the day that Hitler came to power. Reversing this reading Heidegger would say, "on the contrary, it was only then that he [Hegel] began to live."

The Nazification of German philosophy was undertaken even more substantially in Heidegger's Nietzsche lectures delivered throughout the period 1936–40 and not published until 1961 under the title *Nietzsche I* and *II*. Nietzsche had already been enthroned as an ideological pillar of the Nazi state, and Heidegger was appointed to an academic commission to oversee the publication of a critical edition of his writings and letters. In his lectures, Heidegger pays special attention to Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, to which he gives an uncompromisingly "metaphysical" interpretation. What he means by a metaphysical act, however, consists of the total mobilization of force for the sake of planetary domination. Faye demonstrates convincingly that when this interpretation was published long after the war it was taken as a critique of the Nazi domination of Europe, but in its original context it was in fact intended as praise of the German armed forces and their recent conquest of France. The "motorization of the *Wehrmacht*," Heidegger would write, was not just a political but a "metaphysical" act revealing a "new humanity."

Perhaps most revealing is Heidegger's response to a letter written to him by his former student, Herbert Marcuse, shortly after the war. "A philosopher can be mistaken in politics," wrote the future author of *One-Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilization*, "but he cannot make a mistake about a regime that killed millions of Jews simply because they were Jews." Not only does Heidegger refuse to apologize for his "mistake," he takes the occasion to reaffirm the correctness of his decisions. Encouraging Marcuse to read the "entirety" of his Rectoral Address, Heidegger repeats Marcuse's statement about the murder of millions of Jews and suggests that Marcuse should have said "East Germans."

At the core of Heidegger's self-justification was a belief in the moral equivalence between the Allies (including the Soviet Union) and the Hitler regime. The belief that the issue of the Holocaust could be explained as a form of unfettered technological rationality was central to all Heidegger's

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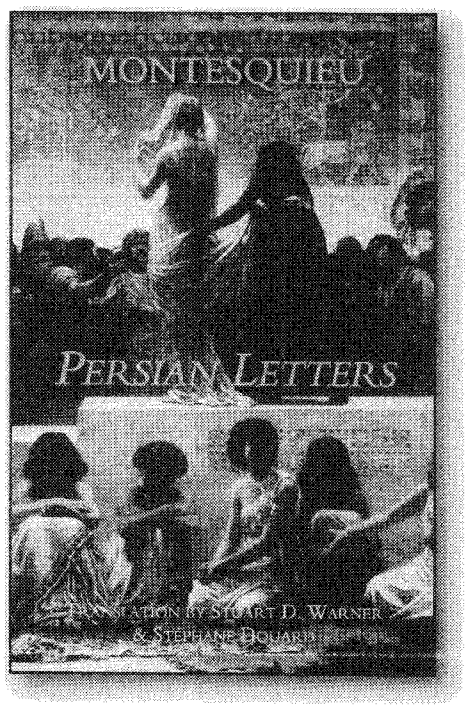
later works after the so-called "turn" (*Kehre*) in his thought. In the Bremen lectures of 1949 Heidegger begins to treat metaphysics as a form of technology that now threatens all humanity. Though he had earlier praised the Nazi conquest of Europe as a supreme metaphysical act, he now gives the term metaphysics an increasingly negative meaning. His statement that "[a]griculture today is a motorized industry of alienation" no different from the fabrication of corpses in the death camps must rank as one of the most odious pieces of self-justification ever uttered. By treating the Shoah and the "Final Solution" as representing the triumph of an autonomous technology, Heidegger issues a blanket exculpation of himself and the whole Nazi hierarchy from any moral and political responsibility. His excuse seems to be "metaphysics made me do it."

THIS IS A BOOK WITH MANY VIRTUES; WRITing, however, is not one of them. Faye often writes less as an objective historian of philosophy than as a relentless prosecuting attorney zealously marshaling evidence against the accused. The book might well have been called *Judgment at Todtnauberg*. It gives the reader little sense of what else Heidegger was doing during this crucial period of his life or precisely how extensive these writings are in the context of his work as a whole. In fact, Faye pays little attention to Heidegger's life or work outside the immediate wartime period. For a more complete picture the reader should supplement this book with Rüdiger Safranski's excellent biography, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (1998).

Faye's is also a very French book, and, to be sure, Heidegger has always had a more revered status in France than in America. When the book was published originally in 2005, it created a whole new chapter in the French reception of Heidegger. This history goes back to Jean-Paul Sartre's early appropriation of leading Heideggerian themes in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). However, the cult of Heidegger did not begin in earnest until after World War II when the philosopher Jean Beaufret and later the poet Paul Celan visited him at his Black Forest chalet. Thus began the first of several waves of French Heideggerianism, putting his work into the service variously of existentialism, anti-humanism (e.g., Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser), and most recently deconstruction (e.g., Paul De Man, Jacques Derrida). Each of these movements had sought either to airbrush or explain away Heidegger's extreme right-wing politics, until it became simply impossible to do so.

The reception of Heidegger in the English-speaking world has always been more skeptical than in France. Heidegger's works were not translated into English until later, and

Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*



This translation of Montesquieu's unsurpassed epistolary novel, the first to appear in over a generation, is completely new and aims at being as literal as possible, including pulling no punches with the erotic elements. This long-awaited translation will be the standard translation for years to come.

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Translated by Stuart D. Warner and Stéphane Douard; 340 pages, clothbound, $28.00, ***June 2010***

"Jokes in a serious work are acceptable on the condition that they hide a profound sense beneath a trivial form. It is in this way that Montesquieu, in his novel, *Persian Letters*, has written one of the most philosophical books of the eighteenth century" – Alexis de Tocqueville

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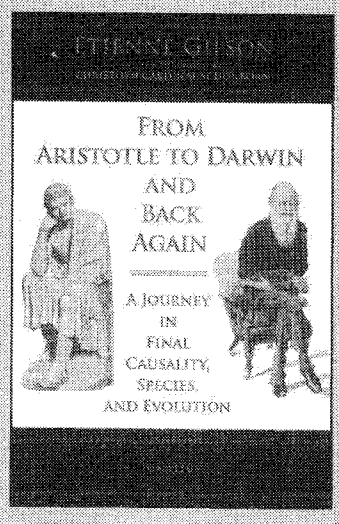

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Foreword by Christoph Cardinal Schönborn

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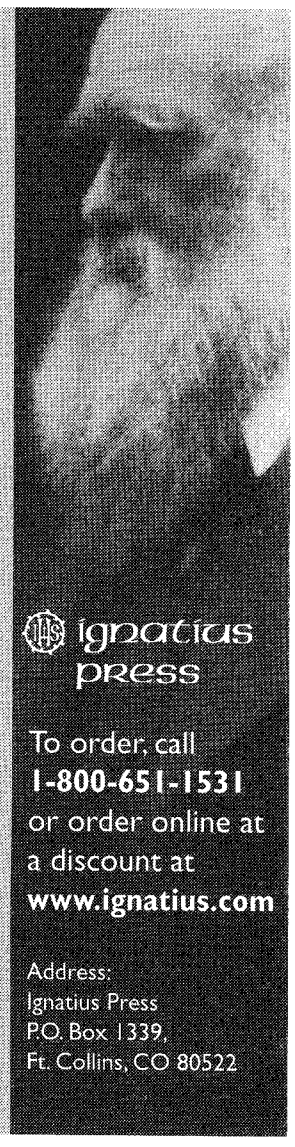

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they were often treated as a non-political form of existentialism as in, for example, William Barrett's *Irrational Man* (1958). For most academic departments of philosophy, Heidegger belongs to the tradition of "continental philosophy" where he can be safely marginalized and ignored. Those like Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty who have more recently tried to rehabilitate him have done so by treating him as a critic of Cartesian metaphysics, the mind-body problem, and other relatively safe philosophical topics rather than as a social and political theorist.

Heidegger's reception in America would not have been possible without the assistance of his student and former lover Hannah Arendt. Over a decade ago, Arendt's youthful tryst with Heidegger was detailed in a book by Elzbieta Ettinger. It was during a visit to Germany in 1950 that Arendt and Heidegger reunited for the first time since their love affair a quarter-century before, and the project of rehabilitation began. Her book on the Eichmann trial, infamously subtitled "The Banality of Evil," showed the enduring influence of Heidegger's concepts of "everydayness" and "banality" on her thinking. The full-fledged rehabilitation of Heidegger in America can be precisely dated to her shameful article "Heidegger at Eighty," originally published in the *New York Review of Books* in 1971. Here she confronted the question of Heidegger's politics but explained his affiliation with National Socialism as the product of "thoughtlessness"—as if he had stumbled into Nazism almost in a moment of absent-mindedness.

To be fair, Arendt was not alone in bringing Heidegger's importance to the attention of an American audience. Leo Strauss had also been a student of Heidegger in the 1920s and spoke of his lectures with a sort of reverence. In comparison to Heidegger, he told the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, Strauss's early hero Max Weber appeared an "orphan child." Strauss did not entertain any of the illusions about Heidegger maintained by Arendt. Heidegger, he wrote, was to philosophy what Hitler was to politics. His "radical historicism" and neglect of the "permanent problems" made his submission to the events of 1933 all but inevitable. Nevertheless, this did not stop Strauss from boldly asserting that Heidegger was "truly important" and "the *only* great thinker of our time" (emphasis added). Strauss's use of terms like "the crisis of modernity," the growth of nihilism, the return to the Greeks, and "spiritual warfare"; his methodological privileging of founding moments; and other features of his thought were deeply implicated in Heidegger's philosophy. If Faye is even partially correct that Heidegger's concepts cannot be understood apart from their Nazi usages, this should prove a troubling conclusion for those like myself who have looked to Strauss precisely as an antidote to Heideggerianism.

How should we assess Faye's predominant thesis: that Heidegger can no longer be counted among the philosophers because he systematically corrupted philosophy by using it as an instrument for tyranny and racism? Faye is at his best when he shows how Heidegger's use of certain German words, innocent enough in themselves—*Selbstbehauptung* (self-affirmation), *Mitsein* (being with another), *Bodenständigkeit* (rootedness), *Schiksal* (fate), and *Destruktion* (destruction)—freighted them with not so innocent meaning in the context of Hitler's Reich. Heidegger was certainly not alone among 20th-century philosophers in defending tyranny. Georg Lukàcs and Alexandre Kojève, to take just two examples who were in many respects Heidegger's equals, twisted philosophy in defense of Stalinism. But the fact that "others did it too" is no defense.

Much of Faye's case rests on Heidegger's anti-Cartesianism (Faye is himself a Descartes scholar who has written on early modern philosophy). Here he certainly has grounds for complaint. Heidegger twists Descartes until he is virtually unrecognizable. He famously treats Descartes's *ego cogitans* as a particularly dangerous form of modern "subjectivity" from which there was a straight line to Kant, Hegel, and finally to Nietzsche's will to power. It is this liberation of subjectivity epitomized in Descartes's dream to make us "masters and possessors of nature" that Heidegger regards as a dangerous turn toward nihilism, in response to which he proposes a form of rootedness or situatedness in time and history.

Yet this critique of the Cartesian (and Kantian) "unencumbered self" has become a standard form of criticism that has received a wide range of expressions. Does the fact that Heidegger gave bold expression to this make the criticism itself inherently Nazified? Is this sufficient to drum Heidegger out of the philosophical canon? I think not. We must resist falling into the trap of what Strauss once referred to as a *reductio ad Hitlerum*. One would get very little sense from reading this book why Heidegger has been considered a philosopher, much less a great philosopher.

In his single-mindedness to convict Heidegger, Faye overlooks the fact that Heidegger's life work was focused almost single-mindedly on one problem, the problem of Being. Our forgetfulness of this problem—this fundamental problem—is what he regarded as the root of modern nihilism. For Heidegger, everything turned on a recovery of the problem of Being, without which life would become increasingly shallow, forgetful, and meaningless. He posed the question—if not perhaps with the greatest clarity, certainly with the greatest depth—who has responsibility for Being? At its best, his work is a call for a renewed sense of responsibility. It is the merit of Faye's book that he shows us how Heidegger, who did nothing but preach responsibility for Being, abnegated this responsibility because he did nothing but think of Being.

Steven B. Smith is the Alfred Cowles Professor of Political Science at Yale University.

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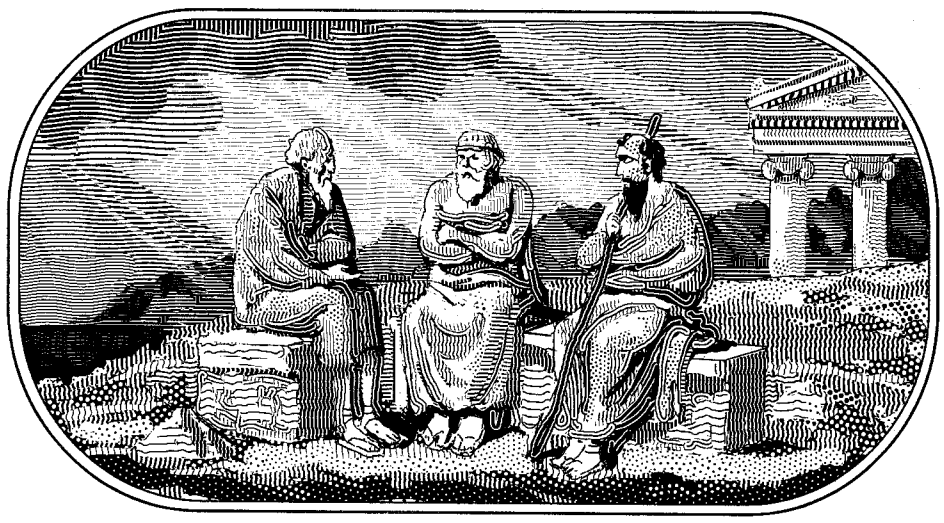
Book Review by Mark Blitz

How to Read Plato

Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues, by Catherine H. Zuckert.
University of Chicago Press, 896 pages, $45



Catherine Zuckert's *Plato's Philosophers* aims to be a comprehensive account of Plato's 35 dialogues. At nearly 900 dense pages, it is more easily carried on a Kindle than in a knapsack. It is a credit to the University of Chicago to have published such a big book at such a fair price. At a nickel a page, it delivers the value that the newly frugal American consumer demands, were he demanding books on Plato.

He is, of course, not demanding books on Plato. Philosophy today is largely a specialist's discipline. It has lost the general academic, cultural, and occasional political importance it had, say, in Germany from Kant through Heidegger or during John Dewey's generation in the United States. Yet it has managed to ensconce itself, for now, in an academic establishment that continues to produce a frightening number of Ph.D.s who teach a staggering number of students. One consequence of the resulting specialization is an explosion of scholarship, harmful because it makes philosophy narrow and petty, yet helpful because one can occasionally learn something from it. Many more books now exist on specific Platonic dialogues than once did, and scholars write articles galore on this or that aspect of a dialogue, or argument in it. Zuckert's book makes good use of others' efforts, while standing as an implicit rebuke to their narrowness, or laziness.

Zuckert, the Nancy Reeves Dreux Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, organizes her new book around two principles. One is to discuss the dialogues in the order of their so-called dramatic dates, the times when we think they take place. Each dialogue poses a problem that Socrates must face, or teaches him something he should learn. The Platonic corpus becomes, in effect, Socrates' *Bildungsroman*. The other principle is to contrast the many conversations in which Socrates is Plato's chief character with those few in which he is not.

It is not hard to criticize these schemes, especially the first, and I will do so forthwith with what doubtless will strike the author as the usual unfairness of the smug reviewer. The heart of her book is less these devices, however, than her summaries and analyses of the dialogues, and here, especially, she has much worthwhile to say. No serious student of Plato could fail to benefit from her careful, intelligent, probing, and illuminating discussions.

There are two chief difficulties with organizing the presentation by dramatic date. One is that the times when several dialogues are performed are speculative: Plato sometimes gives us no evidence, so we must search outside him to find whatever we can. This violates Zuckert's usual, and wise, interpretive practice of not going beyond what a dialogue indicates to explain anything in it. A related issue is that some dialogues could not have taken place at any time, given the presence of anachronisms, or the fact that their characters are too old, young, or geographically ambiguous to be talking together when they are supposed to be conversing. Dating the dramas of the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Hipparchus*, *Lovers*, *Minos*, *Philebus*, and *Menexenus*, among others, suffers from one or another of these problems.

The second difficulty is that there are other ways to organize the dialogues, ways based on factors Plato makes explicit. The obvious one is to distinguish between dialogues that are performed, as a play is performed, and those narrated, as, say, Socrates narrates the *Republic*. Another is to organize by the appearance, or mention, of similar characters, the group in the *Protagoras* and *Symposium*, for example, or those where Gorgias is mentioned or appears. A third is to follow the places where Plato clearly indicates some dialogues' chronological order, e.g., those that are explicitly said to occur around the time of Socrates' trial.

Zuckert's method is most successful when it overlaps an order that Plato himself makes evident, as in the case just mentioned, or in her choice to discuss the explicitly early *Parmenides* near the start of her book, despite its difficulty. Her practice is least successful when it draws attention away from substantive questions, as in her scattering of dialogues that discuss virtue, such as the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*. She herself at times claims that her procedure merely indicates the "order and connections among the dialogues." One might conclude that her method is one way to proceed, but not the only, or, even, the best way.

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One place where Zuckert's procedure yields a surprising result is her decision to make the *Laws* the first dialogue that she discusses, although it is likely the last one that Plato wrote. She argues that it is dramatically early because it refers only to events that occurred before the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian Stranger could not be Socrates, therefore, contrary to what Aristotle indicates.

The importance Zuckert attributes to the *Parmenides* and *Laws* fits her second organizing principle. Here, she is on firmer ground, from which most scholars flee. Plato uses several chief interlocutors—Socrates, usually, but also the Athenian Stranger, the Eleatic Stranger, Parmenides, and Timaeus. Why is Socrates not always the chief speaker? Presumably, Plato did not choose randomly.

It is easy to see why a conversation that includes Socrates as a young man might be led by someone else, such as Parmenides, or why Plato chose not to use Socrates to make a speech as long as that at the heart of the *Timaeus*. It would have been difficult, too, for Plato to concoct a situation (say, during war) in which the otherwise non-traveling Socrates could have held the political discussion the Athenian held with a Cretan and Spartan. Zuckert's method, however, leads her to overstate the substantive differences that such divergence among chief interlocutors might suggest. In which cases, if one did not know in advance that Plato had used a main interlocutor other than Socrates, would one have predicted that the core of the dialogue would demand it? Does the *Laws*, for example, contain anything substantial that Socrates did not or could not have argued?

The issue is gravest with the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, dialogues that are led by the Eleatic Stranger, not Socrates. In order to contrast Socrates clearly with the Eleatic, Zuckert tends to exaggerate the erotic aspect of Socrates' thought. She makes Socrates so concerned to claim ignorance that she downplays excessively the affirmative statements that he makes or, indeed, affirmative conclusions that he reaches, about justice, rhetoric, the order of the soul, pleasure, and other matters in dialogues such as the *Republic*, *Gorgias*, and *Philebus*. Likewise, she understates the importance of Socrates' several indications of the characteristics of ideas; his suggestions about flat unities (such as mud and quickness), not only hierarchical ones; and his elaboration of the importance of measure. These indications often bring him closer to the author's picture of the Eleatic Stranger than to her portrait of Socrates.

Indeed, one can show similar closeness starting from the Eleatic—in his indications in the *Statesman* about composition and wholes, in the agreement between his view of politics and Socrates' (and the Athenian Stranger's), and in his discussion of images. Zuckert has the Stranger "implicitly" warning or scolding Socrates about dangers in the relation between philosophy and the city that, in fact, Socrates already knows. There are indeed differences between Socrates and the Eleatic, but Zuckert sometimes overemphasizes initial distinctions as if they were conclusive.

Another way to say this is that in her effort to trace Socrates' arguments temporally and to discuss the differences among his chief interlocutors, Plato himself sometimes gets lost. After all, the Athenian and Eleatic Strangers and Timaeus are merely Platonic characters. Zuckert occasionally treats them as if they are living and breathing. Even the difference between the dialogic and historical Socrates can become clouded. I wonder if it is not best to remember that all the dialogues stem from Plato, and to attempt to find the substantive unity from which he presents different chief interlocutors and, indeed, makes Socrates himself say different things in different dialogues about the same subjects. Such difference within unity can stem from the complexity of the questions that Plato considers; unity need not mean identity.

A comprehensive approach such as Zuckert's should yield certain advantages that a book centered on one or two dialogues does not. One ought to be able to compare substantive discussions across dialogues, so that one might examine Plato's or Socrates' overall view on courage, virtue generally, rhetoric, images, varieties of relationship among whole and part, and the like. Oddly, Zuckert does very little of this, even though she indicates the importance of the issue of the unity of virtue by highlighting, through its appearance at the end of the *Laws*, its significance for Socrates' subsequent discussions. Moreover, despite the fact that she makes Socrates' openness, eroticism, or stance between the sensible and the intelligible such a central issue, she does not explore the opportunities to understand the nature of Socratic questioning that are afforded by what Plato indicates throughout the dialogues about search, perplexity, and wonder.

She concentrates, instead, on the dialogues one by one, and knits them together primarily in terms of her two themes. Each of her discussions is worth pondering; it is obviously beyond my task here to summarize them. Among the dialogues that she analyzes with greatest insight are the *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Timaeus*, and *Parmenides*. Her discussion of the *Cratylus* is especially useful. Whatever one's disagreements with Catherine Zuckert's methods or arguments, she has written an important, impressive, and, one hopes, lasting book.

Mark Blitz is the Fletcher Jones Professor of Political Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College. His latest book, Plato's Political Philosophy, *will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press in fall 2010.*

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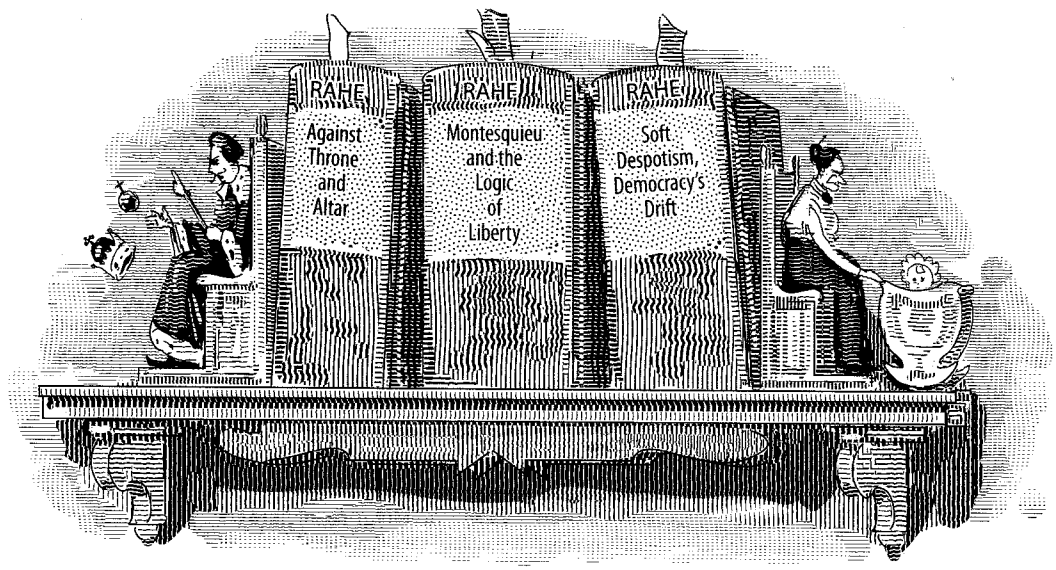
Book Review by Diana Schaub

The Spirit of the Laws

Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty: War, Religion, Commerce, Climate, Terrain, Technology, Uneasiness of Mind, the Spirit of Political Vigilance, and the Foundations of the Modern Republic, by Paul A. Rahe.
Yale University Press, 400 pages, $45

Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and the Modern Prospect, by Paul A. Rahe.
Yale University Press, 400 pages, $38 (cloth), $25 (paper)



Within the space of 18 months, Paul Rahe has published three books that constitute a 1,200-page addendum to his 1,200-page classic, *Republics Ancient and Modern* (1992). The first volume in this follow-up trilogy, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic*, corrected certain "omissions," tracing Machiavelli's influence upon the English Republic (and eventually the American Founders) through the thought of Hobbes and Harrington, Milton and Marchamont Nedham. It was reviewed in the *CRB*'s Winter 2008/09 issue under the suggestive title "A Republic of Devils."

With the second book of the trilogy, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, Rahe, a professor of history at Hillsdale College, has left the dark side of modernity. Not that Montesquieu sketches a republic of angels exactly, but he does declare, "We have begun to cure ourselves of Machiavellianism, & we will continue the cure all the days of our lives." Like the beloved statesman in "The Devil and Daniel Webster," Montesquieu comes to the defense of the liberty of ordinary folks. Appealing to the spirit if not always the letter of the law, he discovers the moderate, constitutional means by which to restrain the devilish machinations of the despotically inclined. As Paul Rahe says, "Montesquieu's aim is Machiavelli's defeat."

Although largely successful, the Montesquieuan re-founding of the modern republic is not without its dilemmas, defects, and discontents. The final book in the trilogy, *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*, explores the troubled horizon of the modern prospect, employing the great triumvirate of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville as philosophic—or perhaps more accurately psychological—guides. While the structural principles of Montesquieu's republic of separated powers are able to decapitate hard despotism, the passionate principles (*inquiétude*, partisanship, and vigilance—of which more later) that underlie and sustain the modern republic are prone to degenerate. Despotism creeps back, in a gentler, but no less liberty-destroying, guise: thus the "logic of liberty" is replaced by "democracy's drift." Rahe concludes this volume with an exposé of the insidious Administrative State that almost makes one long for the forthright tyranny of a Cesare Borgia (who figures so famously in Machiavelli's *Prince*). After all, there are traditional remedies against tyrants, like tyrannicide, but there seems no cure for "the French disease" that has spread through Europe and America. "Bureaucide" is neither a word nor a deed.

Paul Rahe is a scholar whose impressive research agenda has a political point. In crafting this elaboration of the modern side of *Republics Ancient and Modern*, he is driven by dissatisfaction with "the modern prospect." As Abraham Lincoln famously said before delivering his diagnosis of our internal problem: "If we could first know *where* we are, and *whither* we are tending, we could then better judge *what* to do, and *how* to do it." For Rahe, a historian with a political philosophy bent, figuring out where we are and whither we are tending requires an intense backwards gaze into where we came from and who got us from there to here.

Yale's publication of these two books as companion volumes is a rather remarkable undertaking. Along with the matching cover designs, the volumes share the same Introduction. Moreover, the heart of the Montesquieu volume, entitled "The Modern Republic Explored," is simply reprinted (slightly condensed and retitled "The Modern Republic Examined") to form the first section of *Soft Despotism*. Reading the books some months apart and in the reverse order in which they appeared, I initially thought I was suffering from paramnesia until I set them side by side. Not that I have any objection to the double dose of Montesquieu. The commentary on him both stands grandly alone and, with a little bit of forcing, trots along in harness with the commentaries on Rousseau and Tocqueville.

Perhaps because he seems to think in threes himself, Paul Rahe has made an important discovery about an aborted trilogy of writings by Montesquieu. Between his early epistolary novel *The Persian Letters* (1721) and his late masterpiece *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), there lies Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline* (1734).

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This is the threesome of published works by which Montesquieu is known. What Rahe has unearthed is very persuasive evidence that the book on the Romans, which has seemed to many readers an antiquarian monograph of philosophic history, was in fact the first stage of a planned tripartite work whose overall intention was anything but antiquarian. Montesquieu decided to suppress the subsequent, more overtly polemical stages in the wake of the uproar that greeted Voltaire's *Philosophic Letters*—an uproar that led to an order for Voltaire's arrest, the public burning of his book, and Voltaire's exile from France. Montesquieu's second stage, *Reflections on Universal Monarchy in Europe*, was actually set in type but pulled from publication. Known for many decades only from Montesquieu's careful catalogue of his writings, it was finally found among his papers in 1821, published in 1891, and only now decisively linked by Rahe to the published book on the Romans. The third stage of the projected work was to have been an essay on the constitution of England, material that was written up around 1733, shortly after Montesquieu's extensive travels abroad. Years later, this essay was placed directly into *The Spirit of Laws* (part 2, book 11, chapter 6), where it became justly famous for having explained the English to themselves, thereby providing a model for the modern constitutional republic that would be much studied by the American Founders.

Once these three pieces are conjoined in the reader's imagination, in line with Montesquieu's original conception, the shape of his three-fold argument can be summarized fairly briskly: *Considerations* traces the eclipse of ancient Rome and demolishes the allure of Rome's imperial achievement; *Reflections on Universal Monarchy in Europe* establishes the impossibility of a "new Rome" and critiques the Sun King's misguided aspiration toward universal monarchy; "On the Constitution of England" examines the rise of a "new Carthage"—a republic of balanced and separated powers whose commercial hegemony will be of a better, more sustainable type. Despite Montesquieu's prudent abandonment of the full project, I believe he dropped hints aplenty in the work on the Romans that he was staging a contest between Rome and England that, with his eyes on the fate of France, he meant England to win. (See my article "Women, Christianity, and the Modern in Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Romans*," in *The Pious Sex: Essays on Women and Religion in Political Thought*, edited by Andrea Radasanu [2010].) But it's immensely helpful to have something more than hints to go on. Rahe knows how to dig around in archives, notebooks, and the technical arcana of publishers' paper stock and the handwriting of amanuenses. Because he also knows how to think about an author's intentions and read judiciously, he is able to put his historical sleuthing to good hermeneutic use.

RAHE'S GROUNDBREAKING DISCUSSION OF Montesquieu's mysterious trilogy prepares the way for his commentary on *The Spirit of Laws*. He employs the simpler architecture of the aborted work to understand the elusive design of the big, big book that Montesquieu eventually gave to the world. One of the many excellences of Rahe's presentation is the attention he gives to what Montesquieu's contemporary Jean le Rond d'Alembert insightfully dubbed "the great parts." The 605 chapters of *The Spirit of Laws* are grouped into 31 books, which in turn are grouped into 6 parts. Each chapter and book bears a title, whereas the parts do not. Nonetheless, attention to the themes and sequence of the parts can help orient the reader amidst what Montesquieu himself describes as "the infinite number of things in this book"—an infinity that mirrors "the infinite diversity of laws and mores." Understanding how Montesquieu brings order out of the chaos of the political world requires an understanding of how the parts fit within the whole.

> Given the degree to which hard despotism (in religious and anti-religious variants) still plagues much of the world, Montesquieu remains intensely relevant.

Rahe focuses intensely on the first four parts, documenting and explaining the shifts in perspective from part 1 (ancient virtue) to 2 (modern freedom), and from part 3 (the environmental constraints that nature places upon freedom) to 4 (commerce as the means by which we can transform and overcome the environment). He says much less about parts 5 and 6. Although he notes that religion becomes thematic in part 5, and that the final two parts both deal with the subject of legislation, he does not explore how Montesquieu proposes to tame and regulate religion or how that project is related to the commercial republic of separated powers. Following Montesquieu, Rahe does stress the salutary role of Christianity in gentling the law of nations and bringing about a striking discontinuity between antiquity and modernity, but he doesn't pursue the thread of Montesquieu's other, more negative, assessments of Christian belief and practice. This downplaying of Montesquieu's ambiguous attitude toward Christianity characterizes Rahe's treatment of both the aborted trilogy and *The Spirit of Laws*.

More attention to the theological-political problem might have altered Rahe's treatment of another Montesquieuan mystery: the "principle" puzzle. In part 1 of *The Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu surprisingly uses the word "principle" to describe particular passions that serve as the motivating force or psychological "spring" for particular forms of government. Thus, republics are animated by virtue (a form of self-renunciation made possible by passionate love of one's homeland), monarchies by honor (a highly artificial permutation of the passion of self-preference), and despotisms by fear (the elemental passion of self-preservation). Having established this idiosyncratic usage, Montesquieu then drops all mention of a specific passionate principle when he analyzes England in parts 2 and 3. Instead, he claims that "all the passions are free there." It seems that this new species of government does not depend on the presence or cultivation of a governing passion.

Rahe's solution to the "principle" puzzle is to argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, there is a single psychic source of action underlying the English constitutional order. Carefully attending to Montesquieu's description of the English character (especially in 3.19.27), Rahe claims that amidst the general liberation of the passions there does emerge a ruling passion: *inquiétude*—uneasiness or free-floating anxiety. According to Rahe, this restless disposition, first visible in the English, was understood by Montesquieu to be "the distinguishing feature of modern republican man." This disposition is then shaped by the constitutional structure, becoming "partisanship"—which Rahe designates "the fundamental fact of English life." Party conflict, in turn, provokes "vigilance"—the sought-for passion that both animates and preserves the regime. Here, in one sentence, is Rahe's distillation of the English dynamic:

> The partisan conflict inspired by the separation of powers transforms the *inquiétude* characteristic of the English into a vigilance directed against all who might be tempted to encroach on their liberty. This vigilance is the passion that sets the English polity in motion, and it serves as a substitute for the republican virtue that the English need not and generally do not possess.

WHILE RAHE SUCCEEDS IN CAPTURING much of the psychological interplay of the English regime, in general I find his account overly schematic. My own hunch is that Montesquieu did not mean to send his careful readers on a treasure hunt for a hidden passion/principle; rather, he was suggesting something more radical, namely the ability of this new regime to dispense with a regime-specific motive force. The operation of the system does not require any separate or special formatting of the human pas-

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sions (as both the virtue-based republics and the honor-based monarchies did). The free flow of man's self-interested passions channeled through the proper institutions is sufficient.

An interpretation along these lines better accounts for Montesquieu's shifting employment of the term "principle," for in addition to his idiosyncratic usage of "principle" understood as animating passion (prominent in part 1), Montesquieu often uses "principle" more conventionally to refer to a general law or rule that serves as a guide to conduct. Montesquieu refers to principles of war, principles of economics, principles of the civil law, principles of religion, and constitutional principles, to name just a few. Interestingly, this more standard usage becomes predominant as the text proceeds. Montesquieu returns to conventional usage, however, only to make a very unconventional point about the formation of the English character. In 3.19.27 he asserts that the manners, mores, and character of the English are the inevitable consequence of the "principles of their constitution." By contrast, in the ancient republics, the catalytic passion was distinct from the structure; being "additional," it was hard to sustain. Montesquieu wants us to get the constitutional principles right; if we do, the rest (peace and prosperity) follows. By stopping his commentary essentially at part 4, Rahe dilutes the full implications of Montesquieu's logic of liberty—implications that only become clear in part 5's book 26, the book that is most about principles in the sense of rules, and part 6's book 29 where Montesquieu gives advice to the great legislators who might implement his new principles.

Finally, Rahe somewhat skews the reasons for celebrating Montesquieu's genius. Rahe wants to credit Montesquieu with having discerned the foundational features of *inquiétude*, partisanship, and vigilance. Rahe then asks how lasting this vigilance is. Will modern vigilance, like its more demanding ancient counterpart, also degenerate? Rahe answers yes—the ethos of vigilance that sustains constitutional liberty is in fact "fragile." Furthermore, "the modern republic condemns its citizens to *inquiétude* and thereby denies them the tranquillity of spirit that constitutes political liberty in its relation with the citizen." So, on Rahe's reading, institutional liberty (what Montesquieu calls "political liberty in its relation with the constitution") is threatened, and personal liberty (what Montesquieu calls "political liberty in relation to the citizen") is psychically compromised. In effect, Rahe transforms Montesquieu from an early advocate of the commercial republic to its critic *avant la lettre*.

MONTESQUIEU, OF COURSE, WAS SENSIBLE enough to know that all political orders have flaws; his presentation of the English character does indeed highlight some of those human deficiencies. Nonetheless, it strikes me as too ambitious to make Montesquieu both a prime mover in the advent of commercial modernity and the one to foreshadow its collapse into soft despotism. "Sufficient onto the day is the evil thereof." In Montesquieu's day, the primary evil was hard despotism. Given the degree to which hard despotism (in religious and anti-religious variants) still plagues much of the world, Montesquieu remains intensely relevant. He welcomed the commercial republic of separated powers because of its greater (though not perfect) resistance to despotic entropy. Moreover, he argued that the strength of the regime of liberty would derive from its fidelity to nature. Thus, Montesquieu declares, "This nation would love its liberty prodigiously because this liberty would be true." Nothing remotely like this can be said in praise of any other regime. The patriotism of the ancient republic derived from the ruthless repression of all "ordinary passions"; the honor that inspired beautiful sacrifice among the nobility was, according to Montesquieu, philosophically "false." By contrast, English (and American) patriotism makes sense. It is because we are the land of the free that we are the home of the brave. When domesticated or naturalized in this way, patriotism has a better chance of enduring.

On the psychic side, I believe Rahe is wrong to say that *inquiétude* deprives individuals of "the tranquillity of spirit that constitutes political liberty in its relation with the citizen." Montesquieu speaks of *inquiétude* in the context of the separation of powers. The perpetual jostling of parties, with all its attendant uneasiness and fears, is salutary. This is the self-correcting motion that keeps the system in equilibrium. However, Montesquieu also emphatically states that "no citizen would fear another citizen." In other words, vis-à-vis one another, citizens feel secure. In book 12 (the book devoted to political liberty in relation to the citizen), Montesquieu says that "the citizen's liberty depends principally on the goodness of the criminal laws." Those laws do not prevent all crime, of course. They do something more important: they protect innocence (by according rights to the accused), and they enlarge the boundaries of innocent behavior (in particular, citizens can write and speak as they see fit, and certain categories of crime—like magic and heresy which set citizens at one another's throats—disappear altogether). Thus, the opinion one has of one's security is largely a function of an independent and impartial judiciary (whose punishments are characterized by moderation and proportionality). By insisting on a uniform foundational passion, Rahe has underestimated the flexibility of the English system, its ingenious combination of partiality and impartiality, of uneasiness and security, of jealousy and confidence—in sum, both constitutional and personal liberty.

Spelling out this multi-layered logic of liberty may steal a little prescience from Montesquieu (on the soft despotism front), but it restores the complex coherence of his project. It also causes his successors, Rousseau and Tocqueville, to stand forth more powerfully for their unique achievements. Although both learned much from Montesquieu (and Rahe is thus correct to detail their indebtedness), they deserve the distinction of having sketched the perils of the modern prospect. I am quite prepared to give Tocqueville full credit for the notion of soft despotism. Rahe concludes his trilogy with parallel accounts of France and America, offering a political etiology of the French disease, and how—through the Progressives—we contracted it. The prognosis is grim, but by no means inescapable. As Joseph Cropsey prophesied years ago, "Our prospects in our third century appear to depend on the possibility that our moral resources will incline to fortify themselves at the spirited wells of modernity." As a scholarly friend of liberty, Paul Rahe has brought up sparkling waters from the great triumvirate of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Tocqueville to refresh our understanding and strengthen our resolve.

Diana Schaub is professor of political science at Loyola University Maryland and a member of the Hoover Institution's Boyd and Jill Smith Task Force on the Virtues of a Free Society.

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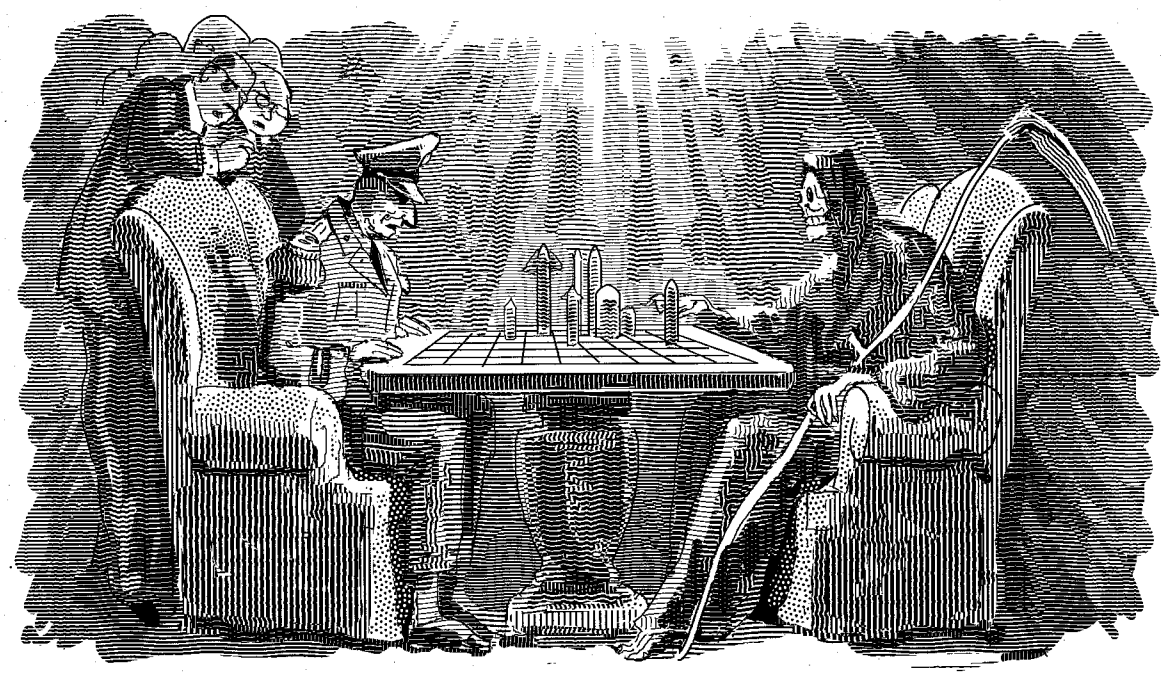
Book Review by Tom Karako

Thinking the Unthinkable, Again

The Great American Gamble: Deterrence Theory and Practice from the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century, by Keith B. Payne. National Institute Press, $29 (cloth), $19 (paper)



Keith Payne's *The Great American Gamble* is one of the most significant studies of nuclear deterrence in many years. Probing the assumptions behind conventional wisdom, and drawing upon newly declassified documents, he weaves together theory and practice to show how a particular school of thought—advocating a so-called "stable balance of terror"—came to dominate policies on such issues as nuclear deterrence, arms control, and missile defenses. Nearly two decades after the end of the Soviet Union, this school remains quite dominant. Payne reveals how its particular "expectations, definitions, norms, and force metrics" have been "so thoroughly ingrained as the acceptable parameters of U.S. strategic policy and forces that often they are unrecognized as the product of a particular set of Cold War conditions and judgments." But what made sense for those conditions and judgments may not make sense today.

The author of 16 books on strategic affairs and director of a graduate program in defense and strategic studies, Payne has served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Forces Policy and on numerous official commissions, including those which produced the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review and the 2009 Strategic Posture Review. His study places Cold War decisions about deterrence within a theoretical context. He discusses the "stable balance of terror" school in light of one of its main proponents, Nobel-laureate economist Thomas Schelling. To Schelling, he contrasts the school informed by RAND analyst and Hudson Institute founder Herman Kahn, who favored strategic defenses and strategic superiority as a more effective and safe deterrent. Payne's purpose is not to rehash disputes of the past or to speculate on what might have been, but to burrow to the historical and theoretical roots of contemporary deterrence policy, the better to judge whether and how old assumptions and ideas fit today's circumstances.

The "stable balance of terror" school of deterrence may be characterized as advocating roughly approximate offensive arsenals threatening both population and infrastructure, a capability of retaliation in the event of an attack, and an aversion to strategic defenses that might blunt such attacks. It was *deterrence by threat of punishment*—such and such nasty things will happen to you after you attack us.

Taking the "rational actor" model of modern economics and applying it to strategy, Schelling recommended a balance of terror based upon the deliberate maintenance of mutual vulnerability. The levels and types of nuclear weapons could be relatively low and simple, just rough and dirty enough to unleash an unacceptable level of destruction upon Soviet infrastructure and civilian population. Roughly similar force structures also helped make the terror "stable." If vulnerability was a condition of stability, both civil and missile defenses had to be put away. Any sort of damage limitation was counterproductive, but the model especially forbade the "defense of human resources." For all its fancy 20th-century trimmings, Schelling admitted, it was "simply a massive and modern version of an ancient institution: the exchange of hostages."

The stable-balance-of-terror model of deterrence soon came to dominate U.S. nuclear strategy. In the early 1960s, such a purely offensive form of deterrence was translated into policy under Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. Drawing upon declassified memos, Payne documents how McNamara understood that strategic defenses that could substantially reduce the possible damage of an attack *were* technically feasible, but he nevertheless chose to rely on mutual vulnerability because it was more cost effective and presumably more stable.

After McNamara, successive Congresses and administrations continued that policy. In 1972, Richard Nixon ratified the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, sealing mutual vulnerability with obligations under international law. The basic idea, as Henry Kissinger noted, was that "vulnerability contributed to peace, and invulnerability contributed to war."

In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) stepped outside this framework, at least in theory. But thanks to

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the cancellations of programs in the early and mid-'90s, SDI never produced deployments, let alone favored strategic superiority or population defense. Thus it did not undo the vulnerability enshrined in the ABM Treaty, which Bill Clinton in 1997 called the "cornerstone of strategic stability." Arms controllers predicted with theological fervor that the sky would fall when George W. Bush withdrew from the treaty in 2002. It did not.

This school of strategic thinking manifests itself today in the advocacy of "existential deterrence," which holds that even the smallest nuclear force will be adequate to deter attacks on the United States, its forces, and its allies. Schelling suggested as few as 100 secure, nuclear-armed missiles would be enough to wreak havoc on a foreign population. In recent years, former U.S. officials from Kissinger to William Perry have signed onto a policy of nuclear reductions approaching total disarmament, an approach that has also been embraced by the Obama Administration.

THE SCHOOL OF DETERRENCE ASSOCIATED with Herman Kahn—the road American nuclear policy did not take—added "deterrence by denial" to deterrence by punishment: not only will bad things happen to you if you attack us, but active means of defense will hinder your attack from hurting us in the first place. Instead of a balance of approximately equal terror and mutual vulnerability, Kahn favored an asymmetrical and advantageous imbalance of terror in favor of the United States and its strategic superiority.

On the one hand, superiority meant that the quality and accuracy of offensive weaponry mattered more even than their numbers. Robust, accurate offensive forces targeting military or political facilities would provide a more credible deterrent than Schelling's 100 fairly inaccurate missiles, which would deter by threatening an indiscriminate killing of civilians. But strategic advantage also implied damage limitation (air and missile defenses to deny an enemy an effective attack), and passive defenses to limit the scope of the damage. Defenses which prevented or mitigated an attack would not preclude an American retaliatory strike against an enemy, but did provide a fallback in the event of a failure of deterrence. By allowing for flexibility, defenses made a threat of retaliation more credible rather than less.

To proponents of existential deterrence, the unthinkable horror of absolute destruction seemed like a better deterrent to absolute war than defenses that would try to mitigate the damage. Missile defenses were seen as dangerous and provocative because they would encourage thinking that nuclear war was survivable—which would make the unthinkable more likely. Because Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* (1960) dared to think about how best to mitigate the effects of a nuclear attack—"thinking about the unthinkable"—advocates of the stable balance of terror maligned it as an immoral defense of mass murder. Thinking about the unthinkable must itself be forbidden, since it would signal to the other side that we might not be content to remain fully vulnerable.

Today, strategic vulnerability is sacred orthodoxy to the intellectual and policy-making establishment that presides over American nuclear strategy and arms control. To them, Payne's resurrecting these old questions will seem downright heretical. But rediscovering Kahn's heterodoxy is useful to combat today's unquestioning faith in the automaticity of deterrence. Deterrence cannot be reduced to mathematics or game theory; it is profoundly psychological, and its success depends upon the contingent acts of real human beings. An effective deterrent must get into the minds of the persons who would be deterred, to get them to refrain from the action in question. Active defenses and damage limitation measures may serve as a defensive deterrent against rogue states or terrorists who do not fit the usual profile of a rational actor.

The simplicity of Schelling's elegant model made it all the more attractive to strategists and arms controllers. And perhaps it did fit the circumstances of the Cold War. But its simplicity may also make it obsolete in changed circumstances today. For while this model provides the major premise—that a rational actor would not choose the irrational—it simply assumes the minor premise, that any weapon-of-mass-destruction attack is irrational, or that there are no irrational actors who would try such an attack.

Critics will say that Payne's reconsideration of Khan's approach tries to make the world safe for nuclear weapons. But nuclear proliferation has managed to make the world less safe all by itself, and the question remains what to do about it. Of course we want to deter an attack, but *what deters?* The answer to this question will not always be the same in all times and all circumstances. But before one may even ask this question, one must escape the intellectual shackles of the stable-balance-of-terror theory.

IN A 1981 ESSAY, "THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR Weapons: More May be Better," international relations professor Kenneth Waltz argued that nuclear proliferation might not be such a bad thing after all. If one adopts as a categorical imperative that purely offensive deterrence is best, then such proliferation might be welcomed as a felicitous means to usher in world peace, stability, and respect among nations. But what may have then seemed a pleasant academic exercise in logic seems foolish in the face of real-life proliferation in the 21st century.

The legacy of making strategic vulnerability the "cornerstone" of security is not reassuring. Decisions made by McNamara more than four decades ago to forgo air defenses (if you're vulnerable to intercontinental ballistic missiles, why bother to defend against bombers?) were partly to blame for the blinding lack of airspace awareness on September 11, 2001. The 9/11 Commission Report dryly observed that "NORAD was not postured adequately to protect the United States."

The best defense may have been a good offense during the Cold War, but even that was a gamble. Even assuming that it paid off with respect to the Soviet Union, we should think twice before doubling down today. Arms controllers who oppose missile defenses often do so without taking seriously what it might take to deter a rogue regime armed with nuclear missiles, or even a terrorist group with a cruise missile carrying chemical or biological weapons. The threat of overwhelming retaliation after an attack might deter an attack by such actors—but it might not. The stakes of hoping that it will are pretty high. As a February 2010 Department of Defense review of missile defense policy noted,

> deterrence by threat of a strong offensive response may not be effective against these states in a time of political-military crisis. Risk-taking leaders may conclude that they can engage the United States in a confrontation if they can raise the stakes high enough by demonstrating the potential to do further harm with their missiles. Thus U.S. missile defenses are critical to strengthening regional deterrence.

Active missile defenses to mitigate the effects of such an attack will not be cheap, but they may be necessary. At any rate, doubling down today on the vulnerability of classical deterrence does not seem like a very good bet.

Those who support nuclear weapon upgrades or robust missile defenses today are caricatured as hawkish Cold Warriors unwilling to face a 21st century where such thinking is more obsolete than ever. But Keith Payne shows how the shoe of obsolescence may in fact be on the other foot. Those who reflexively and dogmatically oppose missile defenses and nuclear modernization programs are locked into arcane Cold War formulae, not the other way around. Maybe thinking about the unthinkable ought to be the job of defense planners after all.

Tom Karako is a visiting assistant professor at Kenyon College and a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute.

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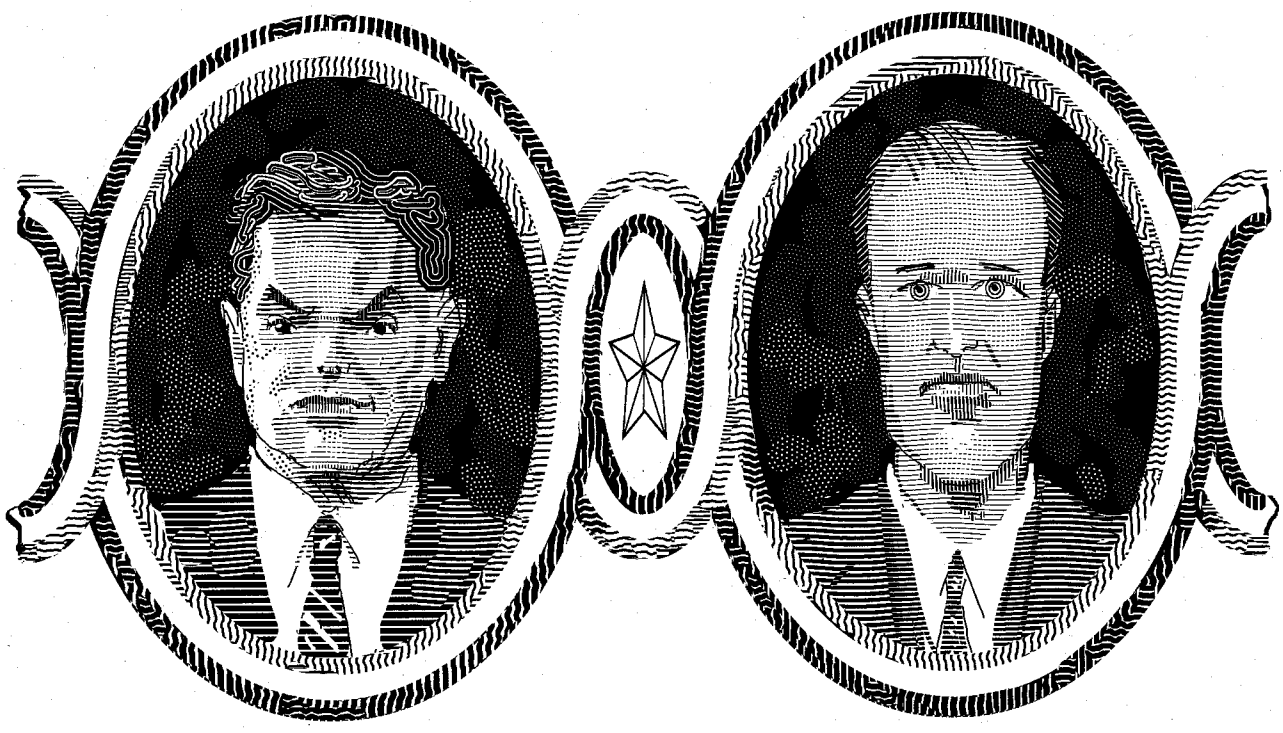
Book Review by Patrick J. Garrity

Mr. X and the Prince of Darkness

The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War,
by Nicholas Thompson. Henry Holt & Co., 416 pages, $27.50



Paul Nitze *George Kennan*

Nicholas Thompson's *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* reminds us that formulating and executing American grand strategy has always been a messy, contentious business. Thompson offers us the parallel lives of two friends who provided contrasting approaches to American national security policy—the advocate of diplomacy who sought to end the Cold War, and the proponent of military strength who wanted to win it (although the two never quite fit the dove-hawk dichotomy).

A senior editor at *Wired* magazine and a fellow of the New America Foundation, Thompson has a personal claim to authority. He is the grandson of one of the protagonists, Paul Nitze, and had access to Nitze's private papers as well as to family memories. He relies heavily on interviews with key players on both sides of the hawk-dove divide in the United States, as well as former Soviet officials, but he unearths no show-stopping revelations that change dramatically our view of the Cold War. His book aims to guide non-expert readers through issues and arguments that are increasingly obscure except to the cognoscenti, who still fight the old battle in new times. We might characterize that battle as between a linear and non-linear approach to American national security policy.

George Kennan staked his claim to fame with two seminal contributions to the formulation of American post-war national security policy. First, while serving as deputy chief of mission in the American embassy in Moscow, he made the case to his superiors in Washington in his "Long Telegram" of February 1946 that Soviet hostility to the West was rooted in Russian history and psychology and in the domestic necessities of maintaining the Stalinist-Marxist dictatorship. Soviet paranoia could not be addressed through ordinary diplomacy or adjustments in policy designed to reassure Stalin and his associates that the West meant them no harm. Second, back in America at the National War College and then as director of the newly-formed Policy Planning Staff in the State Department (1947–49), Kennan argued that "measures short of war"—economic, political, and psychological—would be sufficient to counter the Soviet regime. There was a sensible middle ground for the United States between military conflict and feckless appeasement. By rebuilding the strength and independence of the major Eurasian centers of power, especially Western Europe, the United States would deny the Soviets the easy route of expansion. The Marshall Plan was for Kennan the template for future American foreign policy.

Kennan's approach became public in his July 1947 "X" article in *Foreign Affairs* (his identity was soon known):

> The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.... Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence.

The "Cold War" (a term Kennan did not use or like) would end with the mellowing or collapse of the Soviet system, because that system held within itself "the seeds of its own decay."

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Kennan, remarkably, spent the remainder of his career walking away from what seemed to be the logical implication of these insights, at least those drawn by the foreign policy establishment then dominated by Cold War liberals and born-again Republican internationalists. While still in government, he supported certain covert actions against the Soviet Empire, but he opposed the Truman Doctrine, the formation of NATO, the rearmament of West Germany, and the development of thermonuclear weapons. When a private citizen, he opposed the Vietnam War and argued for radical changes in U.S. nuclear policy and force structure.

Kennan always denied any inconsistency. For him, international relations were essentially a non-linear phenomenon (to borrow a term from modern science). The international "system" is extraordinarily complex, yet simple changes in one part of the system can have enormous, often unpredictable effects throughout. The dominant law is that of unintended consequences—"blowback." The rise of nationalism and the breakup of the old European colonial order, the development of technology, especially nuclear weapons, and the increased importance of mass public opinion and secular ideologies further complicated the modern world. Efforts by governments to exercise positive control over this environment by traditional means—especially the necessarily blunt use of military power, even if that use was "virtual" or "defensive"—were likely to be counterproductive and risked a final, catastrophic conflict. "Nuclear strategy" in particular was a contradiction in terms. As to the Soviet threat, Kennan assumed that the imperative felt by Stalin and his successors to preserve their own rule would inherently limit Moscow's efforts to reorder the external world. But even if the Soviets miscalculated, the law of unintended consequences, as well as good old fashioned power politics, would serve to rein in Soviet expansionism. The harder the Soviets pushed, the faster they would decline.

But the same was true for the United States. The real danger, in Kennan's view, was not Soviet aggression but the risk that the United States would overreact to events and to apparent Soviet advances. The United States, with its insular culture, its inconstant democracy, and its moralistic-legalistic tradition in foreign policy, was particularly ill-suited to give direction to a New World Order. "We have nothing to teach the world," Kennan would say in later years. Kennan came to favor diplomacy aimed at disengaging the two sides, to minimize the likely effects of superpower jostling and to allow for the healthy development of other centers of power. He argued for negotiating the removal of U.S., British, and Soviet forces from central Europe and for unilateral and diplomatic measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war, such as a no-first-use policy. When the U.S. foreign policy establishment broke apart during the Vietnam debacle, Kennan's arguments provided intellectual currency to the opponents of the war in Vietnam and the advocates of arms control.

Kennan concluded essentially that an *American* grand strategy—in the sense of an intelligent, integrated approach to the world, applied consistently across the U.S. government—was impossible. Americans too easily equated strategy with military strategy, and besides, public opinion was too fickle. The bureaucracy always tried to apply written, general rules in an unthinking linear fashion, wrongly assuming that there was a close, predictable relationship between intended policy and real-world outcome in all areas and in all circumstances. In fact, judgments should be made on a case-by-case basis. The correct course of action was often counterintuitive, particularly in the military realm, where increases in military capability, especially nuclear forces, could drive an arms race, increase suspicion, and lead to an overall decrease in security and to war. His idea of containment had been hijacked; according to Thompson, he felt "like one who has inadvertently loosened a large boulder from the top of a cliff and now helplessly witnesses its path of destruction in the valley below, shuddering and wincing at each successive glimpse of disaster."

Kennan's preferred approach to foreign policy was one of grand *sensibility*, an appreciation of the tragic and the contingent, of the limits of human action and foresight, and of the need for nuance. A foreign policy of grand sensibility required giving authority to the few (or the one) who possessed great insight and allowing them (or him) to coordinate various aspects of policy in a way that the bureaucracy (with Congress looking over its shoulder) could not. When Kennan's ability to make such judgments and to direct U.S. foreign policy was challenged by his superiors, he became a dissenter, first inside government and then out.

The columnist Joseph Alsop, as Thompson records, described Kennan "as resembling the priestess on the tripod at the Greek oracle at Delphi who inhaled sacred smoke and then held forth. For part of the time, the God spoke truth through her mouth; for part of the time her speech was sheer gabble. The trouble was you never knew which element in what she said came from God." Kennan "has been more wrong than anyone else and more right than anyone else—and no one, including myself, has ever reliably deduced which was which at the moment of expression." Eugene Rostow, a one-time colleague in government, put Kennan's apparent inconsistency another way: "George isn't the man he used to be. But then, he never was."

Frustration with Kennan's oracular pronouncements and dissents led Secretary of State Dean Acheson in fall 1949 to turn to Paul Nitze, who was serving as Kennan's deputy on the Policy Planning Staff and had been designated as his successor. Acheson sought to galvanize Congress and American public opinion, and the national security bureaucracy, to deal with what seemed to be a deteriorating strategic environment in the wake of the Soviet detonation of a nuclear weapon, the fall of China to Mao's Communists, and executive and legislative resistance to an increase in defense spending.

The hard-charging Nitze believed in the possibility of grand strategy, one that could be written down to guide national security policy and the military force posture. He also believed in the power of American idealism and example and using American power to improve the rest of the world (although Thompson, to stress the contrast with Kennan, perhaps overemphasizes that element of Nitze's thought). Nitze was the driving force behind the famous, or infamous, National Security Council report, NSC 68, issued in April 1950 (although not signed by President Truman until September, after the outbreak of the Korean War). NSC 68 stressed the ideological component of the conflict with the Soviet Union and the need to regain the strategic initiative, rather than waiting on history to sort things out.

Nitze and his colleagues favored a major military build-up across the board, both nuclear and conventional. He denied the accusations of Kennan (and of mainstream historians since) that NSC 68 represented a clumsy "militarization" of what had been a sophisticated political-economic-psychological policy. For Nitze, NSC 68 simply recognized the fact that American commitments and interests needed a credible military backstop, which the United States no longer possessed once the Soviets began to build up their own nuclear forces. Measures short of war required thinking about war, including nuclear war. War could happen and responsible officials had to face that prospect. But more to the point, the logic of war—what might happen if push came to shove—influenced critically the peacetime decisions of policymakers. Soviet policy, in Nitze's view, was fundamentally determined by the Kremlin's assessment of the correlation of forces (a broader gauge than the military balance of power, but ultimately the military element was the most important). Soviet leaders would be more inclined to run risks and broaden their ambitions to the extent that they believed the correlation of forces favored them.

Nitze, therefore, assumed a close, linear connection between American military capa-

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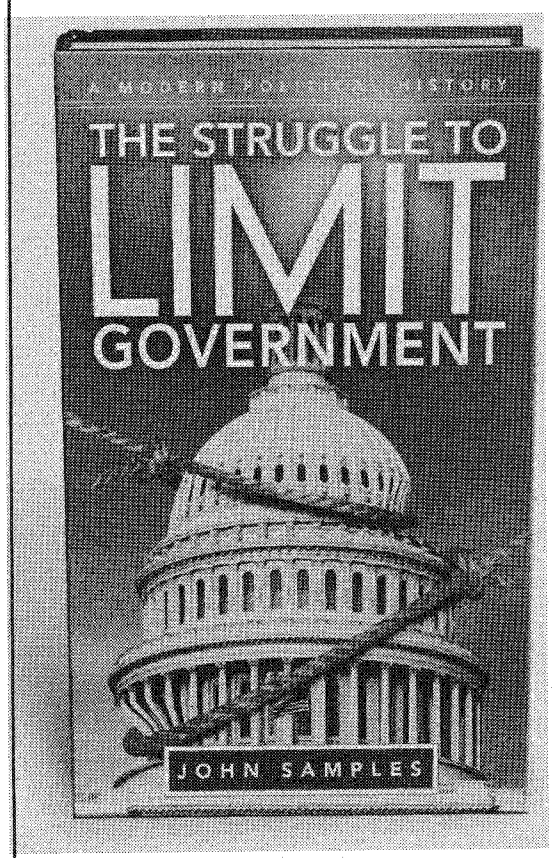

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bility (as well as other assets of national power) and the ability of the United States to influence international events favorably. But, in Nitze's eyes, linearity did not mean drawing lines (or erecting tripwires) everywhere, matching Soviet capabilities across the board, or necessarily using force. He opposed the introduction of American combat troops into Vietnam, for instance, out of prudential (rather than moral) concerns. Strategy required setting priorities, identifying the most essential dimension of the U.S.-Soviet competition, and creating flexibility to deal with an unpredictable world. Nitze advocated strengthening U.S. conventional forces—he was an opponent of Eisenhower's nuclear-focused doctrine of Massive Retaliation—so that the United States would have options at lower levels of conflict. But Nitze's one big thing was the correlation of strategic nuclear forces, measured over the long term by "throw-weight." Nuclear weapons were the queens of the geopolitical chessboard. Thompson describes Nitze's "arms management thesis" for nuclear weapons: "even if you never used them, nuclear weapons gave you leverage. If the other side knew you would triumph in the ultimate battle, they would more likely accede in the smaller skirmishes. Whichever side most feared escalation would make the first concessions."

Nitze's views were a little more complicated than that. By the early 1960s, when he was serving in Robert McNamara's Pentagon, Nitze concluded that technical and political realities precluded the development of a true war-winning capability, in the sense of a World War II-like triumph. But he believed there was a difference between suffering 9 million and 90 million casualties. The United States could, and should, develop a force posture that would persuade Soviet leaders that they could not achieve a meaningful military advantage in any conceivable circumstance through the use of nuclear weapons, even if they struck first. The American nuclear arsenal should be survivable against Soviet attack and capable of degrading Soviet military capability throughout a nuclear exchange. The U.S. should never be forced to choose between suicide and surrender. Nitze believed that the U.S. should develop a nuclear force posture and arms control policy that aimed at "crisis stability" and "strategic stability," in which *neither* side would feel compelled to resort to war, threat-mongering, or an arms buildup because it felt that it was in a "use or lose" situation.

In much of his career, in and out of government, Nitze played (in the eyes of his critics) the role of Cassandra, warning of military gaps, greater than expected threats, and years of maximum danger. Nitze countered that such campaigns were necessary because the American political system was prone to assume (with Kennan) that nuclear weapons had rendered traditional strategy irrelevant and that the balance of forces was relatively meaningless. NSC 68 itself was one such advocacy effort. In the late 1950s, as a private citizen, Nitze participated in the Gaither Committee and other study groups that advocated increases in military programs. While serving in the Kennedy Administration, Nitze opposed McNamara's turn from nuclear counterforce targeting to a declaratory policy of city-busting. He joined with Dean Acheson in 1969 to form the Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy, which supported the development of the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system. (Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and Edward Luttwak were among the Committee's research assistants.) In the 1970s, Nitze served on Team B, a group of outsiders commissioned to review the CIA's (optimistic) assessment of the Soviet threat; and he was one of the founders of the Committee on the Present Danger, which opposed the SALT II Treaty.

Nitze was not above suspicion, however, among his conservative friends, who feared that his love of power and his problem-solving nature would lead to trouble. He did believe in the possibility of arms control, of the right sort, negotiated by the right man. For instance, as President Reagan's chief negotiator in the intermediate-range nuclear force (INF) talks in the early 1980s, Nitze attempted without authorization to cut a deal—the "Walk in the Woods"—that undermined the American "zero option" plan, devised by Perle, who was then in the Pentagon. More broadly, it was unclear why Nitze expected that the Soviets would ever accept an arms control agreement that would preclude them from developing a militarily significant advantage, which (by his own understanding) was the *sine qua non* of Soviet grand strategy.

Who was right? the oracle or the original Prince of Darkness? Thompson presents the story without a clear hero and villain. He believes that the two perspectives, and their representatives, had strengths and weaknesses—"they pulled in different directions, but...the two men complemented each other." Kennan was a brilliant writer and saw far into the foreign policy future. Nitze was personally resilient and understood power, at home and abroad. Kennan was out of his depths in the practical world of policy, excessively sensitive to criticism, and unsympathetic to American liberalism. As Thompson documents, he held views that contained more than a whiff of racism, authoritarianism (or at least a deep distrust of democracy), and anti-Semitism. Nitze, according to Thompson, was excessively

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confident in the orderliness of international politics and military operations. He was not a deep thinker, and he failed to see the contradictions in his position of peace through strength; he was "a man who could let his conclusions outrun his facts."

Although Thompson does not offer an explicit judgment, he leans on the substantive merits toward his grandfather's rival. He cites uncritically, for instance, the argument of various American historians and former Soviet officials that the Soviets "were much more concerned to assuage their sense of technological inferiority, to prevent an American first strike, and to feed their sprawling military-industrial complex" than to blackmail the United States after achieving a posture of strategic superiority. The Kremlin, Thompson reports one Soviet official as saying, would never have gone into Afghanistan had the United States ratified the SALT II Treaty, an agreement that Nitze successfully opposed. In that case détente might well have survived into the 1980s.

That was not how things appeared in the immediate years after the end of the Cold War, when the collapse of the Soviet Union followed a major military (and nuclear) buildup under the Reagan Administration. Common sense then seemed to award the palm of victory to Nitze's traditional school of strategy. But mainstream American scholars and pundits were impressed with Kennan's intellectual sophistication—he won Pulitzer Prizes and National Book Awards for his histories and memoirs—and they sympathized with his "realistic" (in an academic sense) appraisal of Soviet and American power and objectives. The Soviet system failed, they say, not because of American strategic pressure, but because of its internal contradictions and because history brought forth an oracle (Mikhail Gorbachev) who was endowed with the power and opportunity to act that Kennan never possessed.

And now, according to the acolytes of nonlinear strategy, after a brief and nearly catastrophic interlude of excessively linear grand strategy (the Bush Doctrine and the War on Terrorism), another oracle of grand sensibility has emerged; one who cites Kennan approvingly and who appreciates the complications of international relations, the limits of American power and wisdom (other than his own), and the need to accommodate the interests and felt needs of others, including those who now fashion themselves America's enemies. Somewhere, one suspects, Paul Nitze is saying, I told you so.

Patrick J. Garrity is a research faculty affiliate with the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia.

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PARTHIAN SHOT
by Mark Helprin

Farewell to the China Station

IF TWO LOCOMOTIVES ARE RUNNING AT EACH OTHER ON THE SAME TRACK, it is possible that one will derail before impact or an earthquake will disalign their paths, but more likely—here is what is going to happen in the Western Pacific as the United States and China converge on a collision course.

Far sooner than once anticipated, China will achieve effective military parity in Asia, general conventional parity, and nuclear parity. Then the short road to superiority will be impossible for it to ignore, as it is already on its way thanks to a brilliant policy borrowed from Japan and Israel (and which I have described more fully in "East Wind," *National Review*, March 20, 2000). Briefly, since Deng Xiaoping, China has understood that, without catastrophic social dislocation, it can leverage its spectacular economic growth into X increases in per-capita GDP but *many-times-X* increases in military spending. To wit, between 1988 and 2007, a ten-fold increase in per-capita GDP ($256 to $ 2,539) but a twenty-one-fold purchasing power parity (PPP) increase in military expenditures (PPP $5.78 billion to PPP $122 billion). The major constraint has been that an ever increasing rate of technical advance can only be absorbed so fast even by a rapidly modernizing military.

Meanwhile, in good times and in bad, under Republicans and under Democrats, with defense spending insufficient across the board, the United States has slowed, frozen, or reversed the development especially of the kind of war-fighting assets that China rallies forward (nuclear weapons, fighter planes, surface combatants, submarines, space surveillance) and those (anti-submarine warfare capacity, carrier battle groups, and fleet missile defense) that China does not yet need to counter us but that we need to counter it.

We have provided as many rationales for neglect as our neglect has created dangers that we rationalize. *Never again will we fight two major adversaries simultaneously*, although in recent memory this is precisely what our fathers did. *Conventional war is a thing of the past*, despite the growth and modernization of large conventional forces throughout the world. *Appeasement and compromise will turn enemies into friends*, if groveling and self-abasement do not first drive friends into the enemy camp. *A truly strong country is one in which people are happy and have a lot of things*, though at one time, as Gibbon described it, "so rapid were the motions of the Persian cavalry" that the prosperous and relaxed citizens of Antioch were surprised while at the theater, and slaughtered as their city burned around them. And *the costs of more reliable defence and deterrence are impossible to bear in this economy*, even if in far worse times America made itself into the greatest arsenal the world has ever known, while, not coincidentally, breaking the back of the Great Depression.

China is on the cusp of being able to use conventional satellites, swarms of miniature satellites, and networked surface, undersea, and aerial cuing for real-time terminal guidance with which to direct its 1,500 short-range ballistic missiles to the five or six aircraft carriers the United States (after ceding control of the Panama Canal and reducing its carrier fleet by one third since 1987) could dispatch to meet an invasion of Taiwan. In combination with anti-ship weapons launched from surface vessels, submarines, and aircraft, the missile barrage is designed to keep carrier battle groups beyond effective range. Had we built more carriers, provided them with sufficient missile defence, not neglected anti-submarine warfare, and dared consider suppression of enemy satellites and protections for our own, this would not be so.

Had we not stopped production of the F-22 at a third of the original requirement (see "The Fate of the Raptor," *CRB*, Winter 2009/10), its 2,000-mile range and definitive superiority may have allowed us to dominate the air over Taiwan nonetheless, but no longer. Nor can we "lillypad" fighters to Taiwan if its airfields are destroyed by Chinese missiles, against which we have no adequate defence.

WITH THE WESTERN PACIFIC CLEARED OF AMERICAN NAVAL AND air forces sufficient to defend or deter an invasion, Taiwan—without war but because of the threat of war—will capitulate and accept China's dominion, just as Hong Kong did when the evolving correlation of forces meant that Britain had no practical say in the matter. If this occurs, as likely it will, America's alliances in the Pacific will collapse. Japan, Korea, and countries in Southeast Asia and even Australasia (when China's power projection forces mature) will strike a bargain so as to avoid pro forma vassalage, and their chief contribution to the new arrangement will be to rid themselves of American bases.

Now far along in building a blue-water navy, once it dominates its extended home waters China will move to the center of the Pacific and then east, with its primary diplomatic focus the acquisition of bases in South and Central America. As at one time we had the China Station, eventually China will have the Americas Station, for this is how nations behave in the international system, independently of their declarations and beliefs as often as not. What awaits us if we do not awake is potentially devastating, and those who think the subtle, indirect pressures of domination inconsequential might inquire of the Chinese their opinion of the experience.

In the military, economic, and social trajectories of the two principals, the shape of the future comes clear. In 2007, a Chinese admiral suggested to Admiral Timothy J. Keating, chief of U.S. Pacific Command, that China and the United States divide the Pacific into two spheres of influence. Though the American admiral firmly declined the invitation, as things go now his successors will not have the means to honor his resolution, and by then the offer may seem generous. None of this was ever a historical inevitability. Rather, it is the fault of the American people and the governments they have freely chosen. Perhaps five or ten years remain in which to accomplish a restoration, but only with a miracle of leadership, clarity, and will.

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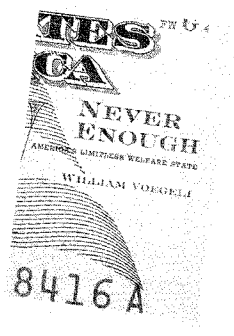

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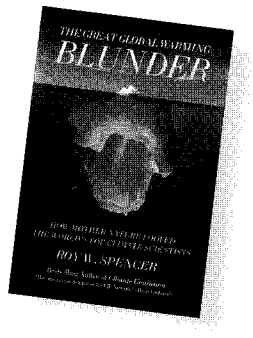

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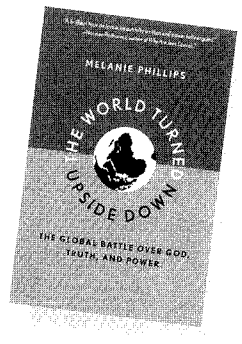

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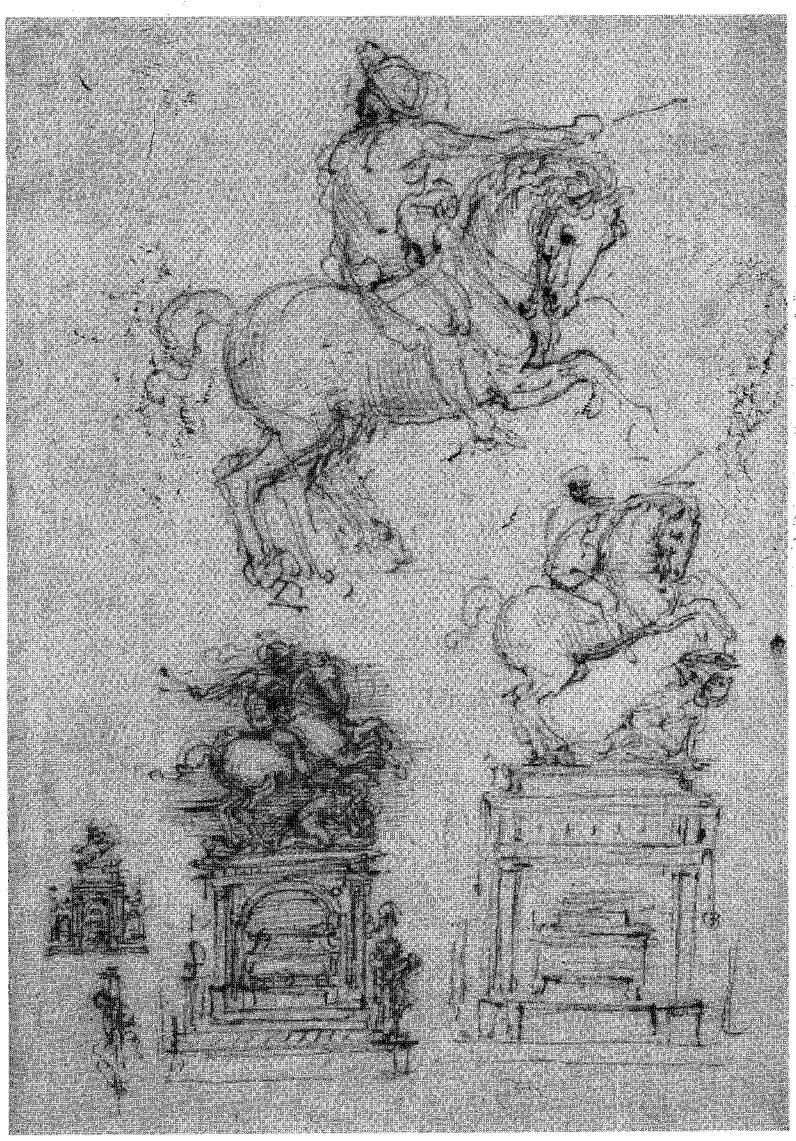

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